THE AUSTRALIAN BEACHSPACE: FLAGGING THE SPACES OF AUSTRALIAN BEACH TEXTS

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Abstract

The Australian beach is a significant component of the Australian culture and a way of life. *The Australian Beachspace* explores existing research about the Australian beach from a cultural and Australian studies perspective. Initially, the beach in Australian studies has been established within a binary opposition. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) pioneered the concept of the beach as a mythic space, simultaneously beautiful but abstract. In comparison, Meaghan Morris (1998) suggested that the beach was in fact an ordinary or everyday space. The research intervenes in previous discussions, suggesting that the Australian beach needs to be explored in spatial terms as well as cultural ones. The thesis suggests the beach is more than these previously established binaries and uses Soja's theory of Thirdspace (1996) to posit the term *beachspace* as a way of describing this complex site. The beachspace is a lived space that encompasses both the mythic and ordinary and more.

A variety of texts have been explored in this work, both film and literature. The thesis examines textual representations of the Australian beach using Soja's Thirdspace as a frame to reveal the complexities of the Australian beach through five thematic chapters. Some of the texts discussed include works by Tim Winton's *Breath* (2008) and *Land's Edge* (1993), Robert Drewe's short story collections *The Bodysurfers* (1987) and *The Rip* (2008), and films such as *Newcastle* (dir. Dan Castle 2008) and *Blackrock* (dir. Steve Vidler 1997).

Ultimately *The Australian Beachspace* illustrates that the multiple meanings of the beach's representations are complex and yet frequently fail to capture the layered reality of the Australian beach. The Australian beach is best described as a *beachspace*, a complex space that allows for the mythic and/or/both ordinary at once.

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All figures come from the author's private collection. Figures are included at the end of the chapters that they refer to. Page numbers are also included in-text.

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: January 25, 2013

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Chapter 1:

Introduction: flagging the space

> *This was my fifth trip and this time, for the first time, I was going to see the real Australia – the vast and baking interior, the boundless void that lies between the coasts (Bryson 2000, 25).*

The beach is a dominating image in Australian life. It is seen on postcards, on billboards, in films, and read about it in novels. Initially a space of conflict during the colonisation of the country, in recent times it has become, amongst many things, a holiday destination, a hometown, a political space, and an internationally iconic tourist destination. While much has been written on the histories of particular beaches, there has in fact been little written on the way the beach operates in works of fiction and film and the significance of these representations. This thesis goes some way towards filling this gap and opening a new dialogue on the subject. The beach has played a significant role as a setting of Australian fictions, both popular and literary. It is a space that many Australians visit on weekends or extended holidays, where some choose to live, and is an indicator of Australia's national identity.

This introductory chapter establishes some context around the beach in Australia, including points of geography. The keywords used in this thesis, such as *myth* and *ordinary,* have been used in a variety of ways in the past. These will be defined in this chapter to confirm the way they will be used throughout *The Australian Beachspace*. The theoretical framework underpinning the research methodology draws on Edward Soja's (1996) notion of Thirdspace: a 'lived' space that encompasses both and more than the imagined and real space. Chapter One also outlines the following chapters of the thesis and provides a synopsis of their research argument and content.

Geography of the Australian beach

Australia is not alone in having beaches and while many aspects of the beach and what it has come to represent in people's lives are universal, there are still very distinct and specific elements to Australian beaches and to the ways these have been creatively expressed. In order to approach the concept of what the beach means in Australian texts and how it functions, it is worth examining the beach's definition, and its geographical and geological qualities.

The beach is first and foremost a geographical border, a natural phenomenon and edge to the isolated continent of Australia. It runs around the entire perimeter of the mainland (and Tasmania), providing a boundary of sand and water. It is the space that both separates and joins the ocean and the land. Geographically, the beach refers to the coastline of a continent (in this instance, Australia), a border where the land meets the sea. A beach must be a landscape with sand of variable quality, and indexed anthropologically by the ability to walk directly into the water. While these definitions seem patent and obvious, it is worth highlighting the distinctions in the natural elements of a coastline. For example, cliff faces do not have the same meaning as beaches. Although cliffs also act as barriers and edges in a similar way as a beach, cliffs are elevated areas of land without sand. They often have rocky outcrops directly below them in the water, whereas the beach is characterised by the open ocean that runs directly onto the sand. Significantly, the representations of cliffs are quite different, as seen in English classic literature (Drabble 1979). The iconic portrait of English writer William Wordsworth, *Wordsworth on Helvellyn* (Haydon 1842), is one example, and shows the different representation of the cliff: a gloomy setting to match Wordsworth's sombre expression. Although cliff faces do exist in Australia, often they are considered extremely dangerous: for example, the Twelve Apostles in Victoria border onto rough ocean, rather than the safe swimming zones of the beaches. However, cliffs are outside the scope of this thesis, although interesting and relevant in a tangential way; this research remains focused on beach landscapes only.

Despite geography based definitions that can demarcate a beach, Australian beaches remain highly diversified. Many beaches are far more hospitable than others, and the

water temperature can vary dramatically. For example, on October 3, 2012, the water temperature at Bells Beach was 14°C, whereas 2700 kilometres away in Far North Queensland, at the unpatrolled Weipa South Beach, the water was 26°C. As such, there are significantly different types of beaches in Australia that encourage a different type of experience. The northern beaches near Darwin are not considered safe for swimming because of the crocodiles (see Figure 1 on page 27); the southern beaches of Tasmania are usually more suited to picnicking than swimming because of the cool temperatures and isolated regions of coastline (see Figure 2 on page 28); and a rainy day can transform a popular summer beach into a deserted space (for example, see Figure 3 on page 29). The term beach then in *The Australian Beachspace* refers to a geographical location such as has been described here. Yet, because of the diversity of the Australian beachscapes, this may also include any of the following elements: sandy stretches; the ocean; esplanades or playgrounds; car parks; amenities; and surf clubs. The term *beach* in Australia has a wider meaning than its geographical qualities. Through its relatively brief history, beaches in Australia have been experienced, viewed, and expressed in very different ways.

Establishing the literature

Australian identity and scholarly analysis of Australian cultural identity is firmly rooted in the notion of 'the Bush'. For close to two hundred years the natural landscape has underpinned what is 'unique' about Australia. Catriona Elder suggests in her book *Being Australian*, "the bush and the country towns servicing it have long been represented unequivocally as the soul of Australia" and outlines how the bush becomes a "health index of the nation" (2007, 311). However, the beach has continued to grow in significance both in daily life and cultural expression. Graeme Turner states in his text *National Fictions* (1993, 28) that textual representations in Australia have a tendency to fall into the key opposition of country and city, where a "preference for the rural over the urban has been maintained". The beach, because of its position as both a natural landscape and suburban extension, challenges this opposition.

Philip Drew, in his work *The Coast Dwellers*, believes that the Europeans brought their own understanding of space to Australia when they arrived in the late 19th century. Europeans journeyed here with a "conception of a closed centric world"; however, it was an understanding that did not fit the geographical complexities of the country they found themselves in (1994, xi). Although it was an English outpost, the Australian colony initially lacked a central city or symbol of its own. As a result, Australia was forever looking outwards: "England was a very distant displaced symbol. Its remoteness, its great distance from Australia, accounts for the outwardness which characterises Australians in their relationship to the world around them" (Drew 1994, 4). Although 'the Bush' (often called the Outback) may appear to be a crucial element of the conceptual identity of the country, the majority of Australians have always lived in coastal regions. The country has just over two people per square kilometre, but 89% of the population live in urban centres; most of which are on the coastlines in Australia: "Beaches occur along most of the coastline in the states of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. This is also the part of the continent first settled by Europeans, and has the highest population density" (Huntsman 2001, 7).

Previous research on the beach has established it primarily as a site of binaries. Geoffrey Dutton in *Sun Sea Surf and Sand* (1985) and Fiske, Hodge, and Turner in their text *Myths of Oz* (1987) approached the beach as a place of myth – an iconic symbol of international acclaim. Meaghan Morris in *Too Soon Too Late* (1998); and Philip Drew in *The Coastal Dwellers* (1994) instead tended to examine the coast as an ordinary space, an integral part of the everyday life. More recently, the beach has received attention as a site of contestation. Leone Huntsman's *Sand in Our Souls* (2001), Douglas Booth's *Australian Beach Cultures* (2001), and Francine Winnett's doctoral thesis, *Myths of the beach: a coastal sense of place in Australian film and television* (2003), all focus on the beach as a marginal or liminal space, an edge suffused with competing agendas. Winnett argued, "notwithstanding the dominant image of the beach as a playground for holiday-makers, the coastal edge should be viewed as 'contested terrain' around which a number of competing discourses and mythic projections circulate" (2003, 6). Primarily an exploration of film and television, Winnett's thesis attempted to "re-enchant the edge" and explore the "oppositional and resistive space" that is the beach (2003, 13).

Leone Huntsman's *Sand in Our Souls* (2001) suggested that the beach has been ignored in serious research: "Have Australian intellectuals decided that the beach is too trivial a subject to warrant serious consideration?" (2001, 2). As Bryson suggested in his text *Down Under* (2000), perhaps the 'real' Australia was what existed between the coastlines. Given the scale of the beach both in lived experience and textual representation, there is a long way to go before truly understanding its significance. The beach in Australian cultural life needs to be explored from new perspectives and expanded beyond the dominant binaries that currently frame its critical interpretation.

Recent analysis of cultural dimensions of the beach by John Hartley and Joshua Green has stressed conceptual elements and constructs such as identity, nation, and the body in relation to the beach. "The beach [...] has proven to be a machine for thinking about identity, the body, desire and nation" (Hartley and Green 2006, 349). At the same time, Anja Schwarz's research into in postcolonial and migrant identities of the Australian beach, suggests we need to rupture "the temporal homogeneity of the beach as an icon of nationhood" (Schwarz, in press, 26). *The Australian Beachspace* takes these different concepts of the beach and expands them further in a contemporary, poststructuralist analysis of textual representations. The thesis asks the question, how does the Australian beach shift beyond the somewhat simplistic binary of mythic and ordinary in narrative texts? Using Soja's theory of Thirdspace, *The Australian Beachspace* suggests the beach is understood as a thirded *beachspace*: a space of history, temporality, and spatiality.

Mythic meanings

Myth is central to how *The Australian Beachspace* approaches the beach. Landscape in Australia has previously been and continues to remain tied to concepts of myth. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner view a myth as a "grouping of signifiers around a concept", an idea that borrows from Barthes' *Mythologies*. It is these myths that create a "focus for the culture" (Fiske, Hodge, and Turner 1987, xi). Graeme Turner invokes Levi Strauss and his theory that myth is a tool to resolve conflicts or fill absences that are impossible to reconcile in reality:

> Our myth of the land is of this kind. Unarguably harsh in its extremes, bizarre in its affectation of beauty, it is just these most harsh and bizarre aspects of the land which we perversely enshrine in our image of national character (1993, 36).

Yet, until recently, this has not included the beach. National myths in Australia have previously circulated around 'the Bush' and its harsh, impregnable landscape. For example, John Rickard states: "It is an enduring cultural myth that Europeans found the Australian environment hostile, alien, oppressive, and that they had great difficulty in coming to terms with it aesthetically" (1996, 41). However, Rickard goes on to suggest that this myth is in fact an inaccurate one. However, the power of the myth, once established, allows it to become "an all too convenient landmark for the creative artist or social interpreter" (Rickard 1996, 41). As a result, representations of 'the Bush' continue to capture this mythic impression of the landscape as hostile and oppressive. However, Turner notes there are two aspects to this myth of the landscape: the way the bush community exists in the middle of the opposition between country and city; and the way the harsh nature encourages a survivalist mindset. He says, "living with the land is mythologised as the authentic Australian experience" (Turner 1993, 37). Yet the goals of achievement are lowered "so that instead of mastering the land, the real heroism lies in surviving it" (1993, 37). Rickard also supports this concept of the survivalist mentality by noting the way the alienation aspect of bush mythologies tends to idealise individuality as personal achievement. Yet on the beach landscape, in comparison to this necessity for survival, competitive sport flourished and 'indecent' pleasures challenged social morals within a community. Chapter Four further explores the role of sport on the beach, and how the landscape both encourages sporting activity and becomes a natural – and sometimes artificial – grandstand, such as during triathlons and surfing competitions.

In *Sun, Sea, Surf, and Sand*, Dutton states, "the tradition of the beach is not yet understood or accepted in intellectual terms, although it is instinctively endorsed by the vast majority of Australians" (1985, 6). As a country, Dutton suggests we accept myths (of 'the Bush', the soldier, mateship and so on) despite the majority of the population not experiencing them personally. Yet the beach remains something many Australians encounter as a lived space at some or many stages within their lives. Dutton was an early advocate for the beach to be included in discussions of national myth. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987), when writing about the myths of Australia in their aptly

titled, *Myths of Oz* (a seminal work of cultural studies), included a discussion of the beach, pushing for its inclusion as a national mythic icon. In 1997, however, ten years after Fiske, Hodge, and Turner's landmark analysis, Brian Matthews argued that Australia still lacked a coastal myth: "...we have no legend based on the way we do live and have always lived, as an urban coastal people" (1997, 15). He acknowledges that this is because of the associations of the beach with "leisure, hedonism, pleasure, indolence" (1997, 15) and suggests it is indicative of the continuing issue of 'cultural cringe', where Australia as a culture, establishes high expectations for its cultural narratives (for example, a focus on 'Bush' narratives) and is then disappointed when the texts fail to represent their actual experiences. The beach perhaps is most likely to fail to meet expectations because of its shifting layers of meaning.

The quotidian beach

Despite the differences of opinion surrounding coastal myths, previous research shows that the beach is important to Australians. It is now accepted as a space that can reveal multiple concepts of national identity as well as or despite being a space of hedonistic pleasure. The beach has been acknowledged as a space of mythic importance in Australia; however, it is necessary to re-examine this reading, as identifying the beach as *only* mythic cancels out much of its meaning. Winnett suggests "myths of the beach evoke the *real* seaside places we inhabit, the hyperreal playgrounds of the tourist resort and the coastal paradise of the imagination" (2003, 7, original emphasis). Winnett closely aligns the myth with the experiences of the individual on the beach, allowing the real to become hyperreal – some combination of the everyday experience and the iconic image of the beach. Winnett invokes Meaghan Morris (1998) and her approach in *Too Soon, Too Late* to localise the beach in the ordinary rather than the mythic. Morris believed that myth analysis explored paradigms of national culture, and separated political and social meanings and thus was a limited approach to cultural studies (1998, 101). Instead, she addressed the beach as an "ordinary space". She used the term "ordinary" as a description of the function of everyday living in the same way that Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau used "everyday" in their texts: *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991, 2nd ed [translation]), and *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984 [translation]). The significance of the beach as "ordinary" and its ability to function as an everyday space is

a considerable adjustment, so seemingly apparent and obvious that it can be ironically also overlooked and underestimated. Despite Morris' attempt to capture the lived reality of the beach its relegation to an ordinary space again sees the beach operating out of a binary opposition. Suggesting that the beach is a space of only mythic significance, or merely a space of everyday function, inhibits the complexities of the real and the "hyperreal", to use Winnett's terminology. What is needed is a new way of interpreting and analysing the beach space beyond its mythic functions and everyday operations and meaning, a way that can begin to account and incorporate all that the beach can be.

It is more or less accepted by scholars that Australia's national identity is fragmenting; a homogenous understanding of what it means to be Australian perhaps no longer exists. However, there are still concerns with the question of what it means to be Australian, and the beach is frequently included in this debate. The beach may be present in these discussions, but usually as a backdrop or site for consideration. A clear argument has emerged that it is worth examining coastal identity, or as Winnett terms it – "a coastal sense of place" (2003, 13) – although there are differing opinions of *how* it should be explored. She suggests, "the beach can be read as a site for contesting established notions of national identity" (Winnett 2003, 12). Huntsman too believes that the beach can reveal ideas about what it means to be Australian. She states that despite the inconsistencies in the national identity debate, the pervasiveness of the beach in advertising, tourism, and popular representations support the idea of a "deep emotional significance of the beach" (Huntsman 2001, 166). Philip Drew suggests that although Australia's continental outline is distinctive, what it means to be Australian is a little more uncertain (Drew 1994, 120). He believes the Australian author Robert Drewe is "[asking] us to see Australians as a nation of bodysurfers [...] This is very different from the nineteenth-century idea of the explorer as a soldier-conqueror treating nature as an adversary" (1994, 120). Phillip Drew is referring to Drewe, the author of many beach stories in Australia. Frequently an author of short stories, Drewe has published collections including *The Bodysurfers* (1983) and *The Rip* (2008), and also edited *The Penguin Book of the Beach* (1993) – an international collection of beach stories. He is considered, as Drew suggests, an author who helped establish the beach as a topic worthy of literary consideration. Similarly, Tim Winton – four times winner of the Miles

Franklin Award for literature – has published extensively with the Australian beach as a setting for his fiction. *The Australian Beachspace* discusses many of both Drewe's and Winton's texts throughout. Both authors capture Huntsman's concept of the "deep emotional significance", yet also encourage a more laidback approach to the beachscape – as bodysurfers, wanderers, and thinkers. What can be seen from the existing literature on the beach is that there is no agreed way of reading the beach space in Australia, and before now, research has tended to fall into discussions of binaries and marginalism. However, this is not enough: in order to find a more useful way of discussing the complexities of the beach, the thesis instead examines the spatial use of the beach.

The beach as a space

The Australian Beachspace examines how the beach can exist as a space of lived experience. The beach can be considered a more familiar landscape than 'the Bush' for the majority of Australians and it is this very familiarity that has been restricting a clear discussion of how the beach functions. This thesis examines how the beach is being represented beyond the binaries of the ordinary and mythic, or real and hyperreal, in fictional and filmic texts and what this suggests about the *beachspace* in Australia. *The Australian Beachspace* presents the *beachspace* as a term to represent the complexity of the Australian beach, allowing it to expand beyond the previously limited binaries.

The Australian Beachspace challenges the existing conception of the beach by exploring how and why the beach operates the way it does in Australian works of fiction and film. There has not been much discussion of the significance of the beach in and to creative works. Although certain authors, such as Winton and Drewe have established themselves as significant writers of beach landscapes, there is not an obvious group of texts set on the beach. The surfing film is a popular concept within Australian studies (see Albie Thoms' [2000] extensive research on the subject), yet many surfing films traditionally fall into the documentary category – tending to be without a strong narrative, instead focusing on the skill of the surfers. There is no accepted collection of beach texts and the ones that exist are not classified by genre or subject matter. Regardless, there remain elements that link the beach texts discussed in the following

thesis together, such as their treatment of landscape, their use of beach imagery and iconography, and the representation of the lived experience.

Space and place

The terms *space* and *place* are used frequently throughout *The Australian Beachspace*. It is important to note that these terms are not interchangeable. Many theorists, including the environmentalist writer Lawrence Buell, have explored ideas of space from a variety of disciplines. Panizza Allmark, a visual artist, explores the meanings of city spaces through her medium of photography. Her article 'Sublime Spaces' (2009) is a collection of photographs of urban New York spaces, highlighting the contemporary significance of urban, everyday landscapes. Allmark attempts to depict "spaces of experience" in public spaces (2009, 385). Similarly in cultural studies, discussions of spatial relationships can reveal further meanings from urbanised, public spaces. In fact, by attempting to catalogue what can be termed the lived experience of the space, Allmark is creating a more complex representation of the urban. Edward Soja's work, which will be explored in greater depth shortly, is a spatial exploration of the urban (in his case, the city – specifically Los Angeles).

What is important in *The Australian Beachspace* is to clearly define the terminology of space and of place before introducing the new term, *beachspace*. Buell's extensive work on spatial theory helps distinguish the space/place divide, and he borrows somewhat from theorist E. V. Walter's ideas when he says: "…place [is] by definition *perceived or felt space*, space humanized, rather than the material world taken on its own terms" (Buell 2008, 667, my emphasis). Walter initiated this point in his work *Placeways: a theory of the human environment* by stating: "people do not experience abstract space; they experience places. A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered, enjoyed, or avoided" (1988, 142). Walter then defines "expressive" places as "the subjective dimension of located experience" (1988, 143), thus linking ideas of place with local experiences.

Walter clarifies the difference between abstract space and local place, and this informs the continual divide that was encountered when examining the mythic *space* and

ordinary *place*. Conceptually in Australian studies, space is a concept that also evokes freedom or independence (Drew 1994). It is the enormous open space of 'the Bush', for example, that made the Australian continent so intimidating to its colonisers. The beach as a space remains generic and anonymous. However, it is possible to be familiar with a beach without having visited it before – there are accepted elements of beaches that remain the same around the country, despite their differences in location. Therefore, the beach is an *abstract space*, yet because of its geographical links and similarities to other Australian beaches, it allows a visitor or reader to identify or modify a remembered narrative to change an abstract space to a *place*. Memory, then, plays a significant role in creating a lived *beachspace* that is both local and international at once. The memory of a landscape is explored in Chapter Three and the blurry, nostalgic memory of childhood is discussed in Chapter Five. Memory is intrinsically linked with space and plays a role in helping the beachscape shift between space and place. The transitions between are what adds complexity of meaning to the Australian *beachspace* and are part of what this thesis explores. One process that assists transforming a space to a place is naming, and this is examined in textual representations of the beach throughout *The Australian Beachspace*.

For example, two of Australia's most prolific beach authors, Drewe and Winton, engage in this process of naming spaces in their work. Both have written autobiographical texts that highlight the significance of the beach to their craft (*The Shark Net* [Drewe 2000]; *Land's Edge* [Winton 1993]). Their texts show how the beach played a role in their childhoods. As Winton states:

> […] in my memory of childhood there is always the smell of bubbling tar, of Pinke Zinke, the briny smell of the sea. It is always summer and I am on Scarborough Beach, blinded by light, with my shirt off and my back a map of dried salt and peeling sunburn (1993, 9).

Scarborough Beach is a specific place for Winton, and it is this beach that conjures up the memories of childhood. Regardless, this is still a recognisable image even for Australians not familiar with the area. Drewe's autobiographical novel describes moments from his childhood in Western Australia. He describes Rottnest Island (an island off the coast near Perth) as a place he associates with sex:

> Only thirteen miles off the coast, it could have been thirteen hundred miles away…now it had a reputation as the most relaxed and seductive place

> anywhere. People – well, girls – were supposed to do things which on the straitlaced mainland would give them a 'bad name' (2000, 114).

In comparison to the *abstract space* of the beach, Winton and Drewe tend to name the beaches they describe in their texts, creating a sense of *place.* Winton's *Dirt Music* (2001) is set in the fictional town of White Point. Although fictional, the setting is still named:

> […She] picked out Jim's house on the dune. It was a bare white cube, a real bauhaus shocker and the first of its kind in White Point. Locals once called it the Yugoslav Embassy but these days nearly every owner-skipper had himself a trophy house built with the proceeds of the rock lobster boom (9).

By naming his beach, Winton creates a sense of place that locates the beach within the story. White Point is a fishing town on the West Australian coast, where fishermen are the affluent members of society. Real beaches and locations are often named in texts as well – the film *Newcastle* (dir. Dan Castle 2008) is set on the beach in Newcastle. Similarly, the film *Blurred* (dir. Evan Clarry 2002) is located clearly in Surfers Paradise, with sweeping shots of the skyscrapers, scenes on the beach, and its focus on the annual 'Schoolies' event for Australian school leavers.

Paul Carter tackles the concept of naming and space/place in much detail, particularly from a historical perspective, and comes to similar conclusions about the transition from space to place coming from the lived experience. He, like Walter, describes the act of naming as an integral part of the shift from space to place: "For by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with history" (1987, xxiv). His first chapter of *The road to Botany Bay* is dedicated to exploring the role of Captain Cook, the "mythic figure" of foundation and his extensive naming of the Australian continent during his first expedition. For example, he examines Botany Bay (initially labelled by the settlers as Sting-ray Harbour, and other variations) and the significance of the naming process. This period of history neglects the previous system of ownership by the Indigenous inhabitants of the land (which is discussed further in Chapter Six); however, the process of labelling spaces acted as a statement of ownership by Cook and the following settlers. Naming a place does not render it merely local or ordinary. A named place can become almost mythic in certain circumstances; an example of this can be seen in the representations, primarily in the media, of the Cronulla riots. Whereas the mythic, conceived, or imaginary lends itself to thinking of

spaces of beaches, this is not always the case. In the incident of the Cronulla riots (which is explored in Chapter Six), one specific beach became a festering place of protest; the violence and hatred was contained primarily in Cronulla. The tourist image of Australian beaches remained globally intact (although Australian society perhaps less so). It is the place name, Cronulla, that now inspires the memory of that incident rather than the concept of a beach. The violence can be seen by the vast majority as being contained. The beach as an unnamed space allows for a more abstract representation, more imaginary and mythic. This is clearly shown in advertising: beaches are often shown without names or locations beyond the state boundaries as advertisements are usually organised through state-wide organisations. Textual examples appear to represent the beach as both unnamed space and named place and thus it is revealed that the beach is a strong representative symbol that is a complicated site and a space of contesting meaning.

Methodology

The Australian Beachspace uses Edward Soja's theory of spatial geography and the Thirdspace (1996). Although an American based theory, and an urban one (Soja's primary example is Los Angeles), the Thirdspace can be translated onto an Australian beach environment. As the beach is primarily a geographical space, Soja's insistence that space is as important as history is significant for this research. He suggests in a later publication, 'History: Geography: Modernity', that historicism has a "critical silence, an implicit subordination of space to time that obscures geographical interpretations of the changeability of the social world and intrudes upon every level of theoretical discourse" (1999, 117). The Australian beach is also foremost a space and therefore it is important to discuss it in spatial terms. *The Australian Beachspace* uses Soja's framework of the Thirdspace to examine the lived space of the Australian beach, hereby known as the *beachspace*.

While previous thematic approaches have worked well to place or map the beach onto the Australian landscape, they have not embraced all that representations of the beach offer. And while it may ultimately be impossible to capture all that the beach can be,

Edward Soja's Thirdspace allows for a better understanding of the multiplicity of representations of the space.

The Thirdspace

Soja posited his idea in the text *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined spaces* (1996). Soja developed his theory of Thirdspace from the initial ("ambivalent") spatial discussions of Michel Foucault, and also Henri Lefebvre. Soja's Thirdspace theory borrows much from Foucault and Lefebvre, including their terminology. He encountered, as has the researcher, initial binaries in spatial studies. The binary of myth and ordinary in this research can be extrapolated to coincide with Foucault's heterotopias and utopias and Lefebvre's perceived and conceived spaces. Foucault's heterotopias are the "real places" in contrast to the "fundamentally unreal spaces" of his utopias; Lefebvre's perceived (or everyday) space is distinguished from the conceived (or mythic) space. Once more, multiple types of terminology emerge when describing this juxtaposition, all rotating around the concept of real and unreal. Soja introduced the concept of Thirdspace as a "purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings" (1996, 2). It is something that can challenge and push beyond traditional binaries. As the Australian beach is a space of continually shifting meaning, Soja's concept becomes a way to map it more clearly.

A Thirdspace is a "creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the 'real' material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through 'imagined' representations of spatiality" (1996, 6). Thus, Firstspace becomes a perspective focused primarily on the "concrete materiality" of the space, and Secondspace is concerned with the cognition of human spatiality (1996, 10). Soja links this back to Henri Lefebvre's idea of real and imagined spaces, and it can be likened to the mythic and ordinary binary opposition existing in theories about the Australian beach. Lefebvre stated that there should be no distance between the real and the ideal space, and Soja takes this further by creating a space that encompasses all – the Thirdspace. Firstspace is the real or ordinary, and Secondspace is the imagined or mythic. Thus, Thirdspace is therefore an amalgamation of all of these things – creating a

"real-and-imagined" (Soja's term) or a "lived" (Lefebvre's term) space. This triangulation approach allows for a third alternative beyond mythic and ordinary; one that fits the Australian beach more appropriately. As Figure 4 (below) shows, the Thirdspace is a conglomeration of both the Firstspace and the Secondspace, something that encompasses all and more.

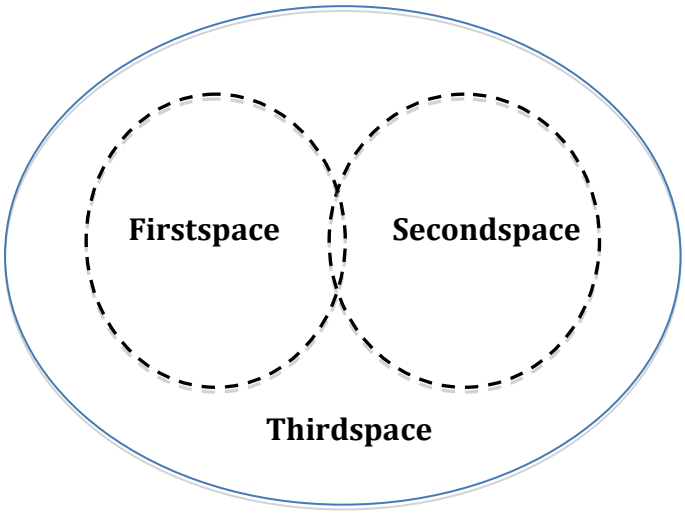

Figure 4: The Thirdspace
This figure, created from Soja's theory, shows how the Firstspace (also known as the 'perceived' 'real', 'ordinary', or 'everyday') and the Secondspace (the 'conceived' 'imagined', 'mythic' or 'iconic') exist separately from each other. The Thirdspace (the 'lived', 'and/or/both') encompasses both the First and Secondspace (the section where the two circles overlap), but is also more than the sum of its parts.

Soja then uses the process of thirding as an extension of this definition. Using bell hooks' writing from the margins as an example, he suggests that allowing for a thirding of space, history, and time, as one example, generates a voice for minorities previously limited by the dualities of more modernist thought. He states "we are first and always historical-social-spatial beings, actively participating individually and collectively in the construction/production – the 'becoming' of histories, geographies, societies" (1996, 73). Humanity then, *living,* is a process of thirding because we cannot exist without the historical-social-spatiality of existence. Thirding in theoretical terms becomes a transdisciplinary idea that attempts to weave spatiality-historicality-sociality as a trialectic of space (1996, 5). It is designed to create a third option beyond the "either/or choice". Soja places much importance on the concept of thirding in which "the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of *restructuring* that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives" (1996, 5, original emphasis). Rather than negating the original existing binary of the Australian beach, using Soja's approach allows *The Australian Beachspace* to examine the beach as more; a Thirdspace – not just a real space, not just an imagined space, but a new shifting space of both: a "simultaneously

real and imagined and more (both and also...)" space (1996, 11). The technique of thirding is used in each chapter, highlighting the limitations of the binaries. In this thesis, the researcher is acting as a type of wanderer of the beach space, exploring the beach on no fixed path that creates meaning by examining the in-between spaces on the Australian sand. Yet it is not only the researcher, but also the narratives of the beach and the people wandering the beach, who become a part of the fabric of the lived *beachspace*.

The Australian Beachspace examines textual representations of the beach primarily in the form of literature and film, although other examples from television and advertising are mentioned. By applying this thirding process to the textual examples, *The Australian Beachspace* expands the catalogue of existing research of the beach beyond the previously defined binaries. Examining textual representations of the beach also reveals cultural knowledge about the Australian beach. Cultural Studies has frequently used fictional texts as a barometer of society. Graeme Turner believed this to be the case when he explored meanings in narrative in *National Fictions* (1993, 1, original emphasis): "[…] narratives are ultimately produced by the culture; thus they generate meanings, take on significances, and assume forms that are *articulations* of the values, beliefs – the ideology – of the culture". Fictional texts reveal the Thirdspace in action by examining how the authors and their stories have chosen to represent the beach in their texts, an example of the imagined space in motion. Textual analysis is the primary analytical tool used in this thesis. Alan McKee in his work on textual analysis suggests, "If we want to understand the world we live in, then we have to understand how people are *making sense* of that world" (2001, 144). Exploring representations of the beach allows for an understanding of how people interact with the beach in real life. Leone Huntsman (2001, 113) discusses how Australians took "possession of the beach imaginatively, as well as in fact" and it is this process that is of interest in *The Australian Beachspace*. Studying how the beach is portrayed in the texts in conjunction with Soja's Thirdspace will open a dialogue of how the beach is represented spatially and imaginatively. Glen Creeber suggests that multiple meanings are possible within texts and "rather than taking a rigid or *fixed* meaning to a text, contemporary textual analysis tends to explore the playfulness and *open-ended* textures of textual meaning" (2006, 34, original emphasis). This polysemic approach to textual analysis frames the discussion of

the beach as a space with shifting, contested meanings that reveals Soja's thirding process in operation.

Ownership of the beach

Australia has a long history of ownership struggles because of its colonial past. As such, when discussing a place such as Australia, it is impossible to ignore the postcolonial leaning of much historical work written about the country. Geoffrey Blainey (1983), Robert Hughes (1996), and John Rickard (1996) are just some authors who have written on the history of Australia. Paul Carter's exploration of Australian history challenges what he calls 'imperial history', suggesting that "empirical history, with its emphasis on the factual and static, is wholly inadequate" (1987, xvii – xx). Rather, Carter believes (like Soja) that history needs to be examined alongside a spatial understanding, and Philip Drew is another theorist who supports this approach. Drew believes that space is an essential aspect of Australia, both culturally and geographically. His text *The Coast Dwellers* is a discussion of the verandah as a middle point between the colonial outback and the modernised coastal regions and the associated geographies of this outlook. He states that there are "no books about Australian space and little speculation or discussion" and that recognising the use of space "reveals how Australians have responded to the physical presence of Australia" (Drew 1994, 10 - 11). It is therefore an essential element of examining Australian culture and representations, and hence why space is such an integral part of *The Australian Beachspace'*s methodology.

Yet, because of Australia's colonial past, it is crucial to also contextualise the space within an Indigenous context. The Indigenous history of Australia is of great significance to the contemporary national identity and Indigenous texts are examined alongside Westernised fictional texts within this thesis, especially in Chapter Six. These include films such as Tracey Moffat's *Heaven* (1990), Rachel Perkins' *Radiance* (1993), and written texts such as Terri Janke's *Butterfly Song* (2005) and Anita Heiss' *Not Meeting Mr Right* (2007). Australia's colonial past is Eurocentric and the representations of the beach reflect that, both in the significantly fewer texts written by and about Indigenous Australians and the frequent absence of Indigenous representation in non-Indigenous authored texts. However, Indigenous texts set on the beach do exist and will be analysed

within *The Australian Beachspace*. Many Indigenous texts in Australia appear to place more importance on fresh water than the beach. Yet there are still some important aspects of the beach that feature in the writing of Indigenous authors and in films that feature Indigenous characters, which this thesis explores.

Just as Soja considers spatiality to be an integral third to the triangulation of history and culture, Paul Carter examines the spatial geography of history in direct relation to Australia. Carter takes a different approach to traditional historians by including what can be described as a 'spatial turn' in his text *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987). Rather than primarily being a history of the continent, Carter attempts to capture the concept of spatial geography alongside history – the idea that the colonisers were not aware of what they had discovered until they had discovered it: "At the centre of the colonists' minds were not picturesque places, but what preceded them, horizons, possible tracks, and bounding spaces" (Carter 1987, xxi). The colonisers did not know the same continent that contemporary Australians do, and without understanding this concept, Carter believes that exploring and discovery become a superfluous element of our national history. It is therefore his intention to write against this: to create a work that uses spatiality as a tool of historical exploration. Although *The Australian Beachspace* is not focused on a historical reading of the beach (as much has been written on this before), it uses the idea of spatiality as a tool when it approaches representations on the beach space.

Thesis structure

In the following chapters this thesis undertakes a detailed discussion of the beach through a number of thematic concerns, each initially framed around a popular representation associated with the beach: the beauty of the beach; the 'badlands' of the beach; the urban beach; the functionality of the beach; and the beach as a setting for an egalitarian society. These themes have been chosen because each provides an initial popular reading of the beach space and then allows for a more complex interpretation that goes beyond binary oppositions. Surfers Paradise, on the Gold Coast (Queensland), and Bondi Beach, in Sydney (New South Wales) are two key beaches that this thesis discusses in conjunction with many others. These two beaches are iconic,

internationally renowned, and also most commonly represented in narrative texts. It is therefore of no surprise that these beaches have a complexity that is discussed throughout many chapters of *The Australian Beachspace.* In order to properly explore beyond the binaries that continue to contain the beach thus far, *The Australian Beachspace* will use Edward Soja's concept of Thirdspace to suggest a new way of reading the Australian beach that goes beyond the mythic and the ordinary, suggesting instead that it can be termed a *beachspace*.

Throughout the thesis, the term fiction is used to refer to both film and written forms of textual expression. Both mediums are narrative driven, although there are differences between the two. As Turner suggests there are differences in the way narrative is used. Just one example is that in film, "irony is difficult to achieve while symbol is difficult to avoid" (1993, 16). Turner speaks further on the problems between comparing and evaluating film and fiction alongside each other. Ultimately he suggests that "the generation of meaning in film and fiction does not take place within an exclusively literary or filmic context; rather, the narratives are particular transformations of the myths of culture" (1993, 22). *The Australian Beachspace* suggests the beach image is a complex one within Australian culture and therefore it is important to explore its narrative representations in a variety of textual examples: regardless of form, the cultural forces that drive the production of myth generate the creation of texts. Each chapter of *The Australian Beachspace* explores different representations of the beach, loosely themed for common myths, and identifies the complexities of the Australian *beachspace* and how authors and filmmakers struggle to completely and authentically capture all the beach is and can be.

Chapter Two – Healing Spaces

The Australian beach is an image often represented in international tourism advertising. As Huntsman (2001, 140) states: "the beach is incessantly invoked as an image of 'the Australian way of life' in the promotion of tourism and the advertising of products". The beach is a place of idyllic, almost nostalgic, beauty and is represented as such in many Australian texts. The natural beach itself is one of beauty, captured numerous times in

photography and art. The visual aesthetic of film also allows for beautiful imagery of the ocean and beachscape, such as in the opening shots of *Newcastle* (dir. Dan Castle 2008) and *The Long Weekend* (dir. Colin Eggleston 1978). Although less visual, literature still encapsulates a tremendous picture of the beach. The landscape's naturalness allows the beach to become a place of healing, escape, and spirituality. Chapter Two reveals the beach as a transformative *beachspace* – a type of transcendent spiritual plane that can be accessed through the purely natural beachscape. The thirding in this chapter sees the beach as a clear example of a real-and-imagined place, both the earthly natural world and the higher, spiritual world brought onto this level.

Chapter Three – Badland Beaches

Chapter Three explores the beach as an 'underbelly', a space filled with dark undertones that are not always visible on the surface. An example of this is a string of gay hate murders that took place on and around Bondi Beach during the late 1980s and 1990s. Although this chapter explores some examples of true crime, the threat of crime, assault, or kidnapped children also continues to be perpetuated in fictional texts. The possibilities of the Beaumont children's disappearance, an infamous unsolved case during the 1960s, are captured in *Time's Long Ruin* (Orr 2011), a fictional exploration of what happened the day the children were lost. The documentary *Bra Boys* (dir. Sonny Abberton 2007) includes footage and discussion of the now infamous rioting in Cronulla, New South Wales during 2005. Horror films also disrupt the traditionally beautiful space and play with the dichotomy of landscape: two examples discussed in this chapter are *The Long Weekend* (dir. Colin Eggleston 1978) and *Lost Things* (dir. Martin Murphy 2003), which see the glistening sands and sunlight sky become a sharp contrast to the horror that unfolds throughout the films.

The beach is also a public space with interestingly lax social rules compared to other, more urbanised areas. A bag may be left on the sand while the owner swims in the surf, only occasionally checking it remains safely untouched. Valuables are left in cars, bags, or even buried in the sand. The undercurrent of fear continually makes itself known in the beach space, perhaps as a result of what Ross Gibson terms "badlands". His work

Seven Versions of an Australian Badland (2002) is used in this chapter to explore the concept of the beach as a landscape that retains memory. This further complicates the one-dimensional representations of the beach that do not allow for the complexities of meaning. In this instance, the *beachspace* is closely linked to the thirding seen in Chapter Two – a higher plane connecting with the earthly level of existence allows for transcendence and a spiritual connection. This connection, however, is not always heavenly or transcendent like in the previous chapter. The beach as a badland is a Thirdspace of the real-and-imagined spaces. The beach exists as much for its seething underbelly as it does for its beautiful day time image.

Chapter Four – Urban Beachspace

The Australian beach is becoming increasingly more urban as the city and its suburbs encroach further onto the sand. Technological advancements are just one example of the collision of the natural and the urban on the Australian beach. The beach is under the eye of the lifeguard from the tower, and increasingly, the beach is also observed through technological means such as cameras installed to detect erosion. The beach maintains a strong connection with nature as seen in Chapter Two, yet in many instances the beach is an extension of the many suburbs surrounding the capital cities. In fact, Fiske, Hodge, and Turner believe it is this opposition that makes the beach such a strong landscape in Australian culture:

> In order to more fully understand the cultural function of the beach we need to examine the ways in which, while drawing so heavily on the natural, it manages to fit so seamlessly into its urban context (culture) without losing its potential for its primary meaning (nature) (1987, 54).

Ann Game (1990, 108) proposes that Bondi, more than any other beach, "stands for Australia". The urban Bondi "produces attachments" to the natural, and in fact, Game believes that the culture/nature situation is a combination rather than an opposition and allows for movement in between (1990, 112). Yet the infiltration of nature to the urban beach can also generate a fear: nature remains an unpredictable element that cannot be controlled (such as shark attacks and wild weather).

This chapter explores the role of the urbanised beach using two specific examples – Bondi Beach (New South Wales) and the Gold Coast region (in particular, popular beach Surfers Paradise, Queensland) – that are prime illustrations of beaches that clearly struggle with the urban and natural divide. In order to examine representations, this chapter looks at texts such as *Coolangatta Gold* (dir. Igor Auzins 1984), *Goodbye Paradise* (dir. Carl Shultz 1981), *Blurred* (dir. Evan Clarry 2002) and *The Empty Beach* (Corris 1983), all of which are set on the Gold Coast or Bondi. Both tourist centres, and the setting of many fictional texts, these beaches provide an opportunity to explore this frequently discussed binary because of the way these beaches tip more one way than the other. Chapter Four suggests that the beaches that are consistently struggling to maintain balance between the urban and the natural, such as Bondi and Surfers Paradise, are actually not successful examples of Thirdspace in motion. These examples reveal the struggles of trying to fit the beach into a particular space, rather than letting the beach organically develop on its own.

Chapter Five – The Lived Experience

The beach is both a holiday destination and a hometown for many members of the Australian public. A popular tourist location, many beaches are inundated with visitors in the summer months from both international and national locations. Yet there remains a significant portion of the population who live on the coast throughout the year. This chapter approaches the beach as a lived *beachspace* – a real-and-imagined space. In this instance, these concepts refer to the way the beach is interpreted so differently by the visiting tourists and the locals who live there. This chapter explores the inherent tensions that exist in beach spaces between these two groups and the way they interact with the same space. Texts such as *Night Surfing* (Capp 1996) and *Silver Bay* (Moyes 2007) attempt to examine this divide, to varying degrees of success.

There are other aspects discussed in Chapter Five, in particular, the Australian tradition of taking family holidays at the beach. Childhood on the beach plays a significant part in our memories of the beach landscape through to adulthood. This chapter explores these concepts in fiction and also memoir, examining both Winton and Drewe's

autobiographical works that highlight the influence the beach had on them as children. Memoir is an example of how the beach can become complex on an individual level, combining memory, experience, and imagination simultaneously. Winton in particular openly examines how childhood and memory had an impact on his writing style. Memory then is a significant aspect of how texts can create the *beachspace*, bringing the remembered mythic space into the ordinary place. The beach is most clearly internalised as a type of lived experience, and this chapter explores how textual representations often struggle to accurately portray the layers of experience.

Chapter Six – 'We Grew Here, You Flew Here'

The beach in Australia has been considered to be an ideal space of equality, a space that levels social distinctions. Ann Game (1990, 115) suggested the beach is an equaliser: "no one owns the sun, sea, surf – or everyone, all Australians, own it". Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1897, 62) contribute that people are judged based not on their 'normal' lives (away from the beach), but instead by their use of the beach; everyone's employment or wealth status is discarded. The act of tanning also equalises by normalising all classes and ages: "the naturalness of tan serves to naturalise class: leisure, money and an attitude of mind are creators of meaning that provide access to the natural" (Fiske, Hodge, and Turner 1987, 62). Yet, the act of tanning also alienates, by helping create the narcissistic role of beauty on the beach. Although the beach allows all types: multiple shapes, sizes, and figures; whether each is as accepted as traditionally beautiful is arguable.

Chapter Six explores concepts of egalitarianism under four major areas: gender, ethnicity, body, and class. Textual representations such as *Puberty Blues* (Lette and Carey 1979) suggest a lack of equality, with the young narrator condemning the family friendly beaches of the south end of Cronulla compared to the more "trendy" beach of Greenhills. This text also illustrates a significant gender divide that is repeated in other surfing narratives. The Cronulla riots of 2005 particularly implied that the beach could not be idealised as a place of equality, with ethnicity becoming a violent dividing factor. "We grew here, you flew here" was the taunt that filled the media in the weeks

surrounding the incident. Indigenous representations of the beach are also significant in this chapter.

Textually, representations of the beach are divided, showing both an idealised equal treatment and the less attractive struggles with racism. Gender inequality also is a contentious issue on the beachscape, and some texts still appear to objectify the women on the sand. The costume choices of some films objectify both male and female bodies. Surfing texts, and the surfing culture in general, are often considered a very male orientated lifestyle. These tensions of equality within textual representations are discussed in this chapter and ultimately suggest that the beach cannot be purely labelled as egalitarian or not, but instead a more complex union of the both. Once again, the Australian beach is best described as a *beachspace* with the messy mixture of both an idealised egalitarianism and the everyday realities of equality on the beach: it is best described as an and/or/both space of egalitarianism.

Chapter Seven - Discussion

By examining the Australian beach in thematic chapters, *The Australian Beachspace* explores the meaning of myth and ordinary on the beach and how textual representations attempt to reveal the Thirdspace in motion. Chapter Seven draws together the conclusions of each chapter and discusses how the Australian beach is a lived *beachspace*. Not all texts successfully capture the Thirdspace of the beach: for example, beach films in Australia are rarely critically or financially successful (for example, *Newcastle*). Yet there continue to be attempts to capture the Australian beach in some visual forms: the recent release of a new *Puberty Blues* television series (Edwards and Banks 2012) and the quickly axed reality program *The Shire* (Culvenor 2012), suggest that the beach remains a popular concept for Australian viewers. *The Australian Beachspace* suggests some possible reasons for this and flags that the term *beachspace* is only the beginning of capturing all the Australian beach can be.

Conclusion

The Australian Beachspace suggests that fictional texts deconstruct the traditionally mythic expectations of the beach, while simultaneously dismantling the concept of the beach as a merely ordinary element of Australian life. Instead the beach seamlessly shifts meanings into a Thirdspace – a 'lived' space, or real-and-imagined space, that goes beyond the perceived and conceived, and which is labelled as the *beachspace*. The beach is not marginal or liminal; rather it allows the imaginative and the social to exist simultaneously within the same landscape. Concepts of the imagined and the real come into conflict, creating tension; perhaps it is this that most clearly identifies how the beach cannot be contained within labels as inadequate as mythic and ordinary or imagined and real. Texts that attempt to only highlight one or the other are not successful. Although this research borrows elements of liminal spaces (that is concepts of transition and shifting ambiguities), it builds upon the concept further, into the Thirdspace. Whereas liminal spaces are categorised by disorientation and a *loss* of belonging, the beach creates a *sense* of belonging – multiple belongings. It is because of these simultaneous senses of belongings that the beach can become such a charged and conflicted space. *The Australian Beachspace* focuses on the contested, shifting *beachspace* that uneasily struggles and shifts amongst the mythic and the ordinary, amongst the imagined and real, becoming a lived space. The representations of this space in Australian texts form the primary evidence within this thesis arguing that the beach can be seen as a Thirdspace or real-and-imagined space.

The fictional texts used in this thesis were selected on two basic criteria: they must have been written by an Australian author; and take place in Australia. Many Australian authors have written about international beaches. However, this study was interested primarily in texts that are discussing Australian beaches. The texts also needed to include at least one key pivotal scene about or set on the beach. For example, Gregor Jordan's *Romper Stomper* is primarily set in urban Melbourne; however, the climatic ending occurs on a rainy Melbourne beach. Similarly, *On the Beach* (Shute 1957), although titled appropriately is primarily concerned with the cities and oceans. Yet pivotal sequences do occur on the beach, including the haunting final scenes. Other texts are far more centred around beaches: the majority of Winton's works are primarily set

in beachside towns, such as *Dirt Music* (2001) and *Breath* (2008). The works selected do not represent an exhaustive study. Many earlier texts have been considered in great depth before and would not add to the contemporary discussion. However, this study has uncovered as many Australian texts as possible that relate to Australian beaches. In doing so, *The Australian Beachspace* attempts to provide a detailed examination of Australian texts (both filmic and literary) that discuss the Australian beach and suggest they are of significance to the Australian concept of national identity through their interaction with and beyond the mythic and the ordinary.

Figure 1: Darwin Beach

The beaches in Darwin are, as can be seen in this image, not ideal circumstances for swimming and sunbathing on the water's edge. This beach, just outside of the city, and like the majority of beaches in this area, is considered dangerous because of the infestation of crocodiles in the water. Regardless, Darwin is still a popular tourist destination and a port for luxury cruises.

Figure 2: Beach in Bicheno, Tasmania

In comparison, this image of Bicheno Beach in Tasmania has beautiful, clear ocean and small strips of sandy areas. However, because of the cool water temperatures and the lack of patrolled areas, this beach is not a popular swimming destination. The picnic table visible in the foreground suggests that this beachside area is more popular for observation rather than swimming or sunbathing. Bicheno is located on the eastern coast of Tasmania, roughly 180 kilometres drive from the capital city Hobart. As such, it is not considered a significant tourist destination of the area.

Figure 3: Winter's day in Burleigh Heads, Queensland

This image shows Burleigh Heads, a popular destination in the Gold Coast region of Queensland. The high-rise accommodation along the right of the frame shows that this beach is normally a place of activity and tourism. Yet on this overcast July day there were very few people to be seen. Regardless, the lifeguard presence is there with the red and yellow flags signifying which parts of the ocean are safe for swimming. Their presence is continual all year round, despite the lack of popularity during the winter months.

Chapter 2:

Healing Spaces: exploring the beach as a space of transformation and transcendence

> *The electric cleansing of the surf is astonishing, the cold effervescing over the head and trunk and limbs. And the internal results are a greater wonder. At once the spirits lift (Drewe 1983, 158)*.

The natural beauty of the beach is, perhaps, an obvious concept. A well-known example of an Australian beach as traditionally beautiful is the long-running television serial *Home and Away* (Alan Bateman 1988 – ongoing). *Home and Away* is one of Australia's most successful international exports, especially in the United Kingdom (Turner and Cunningham 2000). Set in the fictional coastal town of Summer Bay, the show is a family orientated soap opera that frequently showcases images of the beach. The current miniseries, *Puberty Blues* (John Edwards and Imogen Banks 2012), a contemporary retelling of Carey and Lette's popular text, suggests that the image of the beach as a beautiful landscape with stories worth telling is still an ongoing one in Australian society.

It is important to note the significant differences between the beach and other physically beautiful areas in Australia. The Australian continent has a diversity of natural landscapes (such as rainforests along the northern coast of Queensland; desert areas in the centre of the continent; and snow-capped mountains in New South Wales) and yet the beach is still considered a particularly marketable and palatable one. Perhaps it is because some part of the beach is accessible in all states of the country (with the exception of the landlocked Australian Capital Territory), and the major urban areas have beaches within reach. This plays a part, according to Leone Huntsman, of

why the beach is so popular: "a combination of favourable climate, geography, accessibility, and – eventually – history and culture, have combined to enhance the ability and the inclination of Australians to respond to the lure of the beach" (2001, 11). Australia benefits from hot summer days usually without much rain (although this differs in the tropical regions), which increases the popularity of the beach throughout the summer months. Particularly in the northern beaches, the winter is mild enough to allow for ocean swimming nearly all year round in comfortable water temperatures. Geographically then, the natural advantages of the Australian beach generate a favourable destination for holidays.

The most common representation of the beach in Australian culture is that of natural and physical beauty. It is certainly this quality that features in much international advertising of the beach. For example, Tourism Queensland had one of their biggest advertising successes in 2009 with the "Best Job In The World" campaign: an opportunity for one entrant to win a job as 'Island Caretaker' (Tourism Queensland 2011). The campaign itself was hugely successful and featured images of the iconic Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Northern Queensland. This campaign was primarily a competition, yet it obviously capitalised on the beauty of Hamilton Island as a major part of its strategy. As a result, new online content, such as the winner's blog, was created that continues to showcase the natural beauty of the beach. The winner, Ben Southall, updated readers regularly on his activities around the area, frequently emphasising the beautiful beaches and encouraging tourists and visitors to the area. An early entry details one of his first days on Whitehaven beach: "as we pulled into the bay the sight was spectacular; infinite blue skies, deep green bush, and an ocean occasionally dotted with pleasure craft, all there for the same thing – to enjoy Queensland's most beautiful beach…it's official!" (Southall 2009).

This chapter explores fictional representations of Australian beaches, focusing on those that highlight the physical beauty. Films in particular, because of their inherent visual aesthetic, often show gorgeous beachscapes. In some cases, the beauty is contrasted with horrors that unfold (such as *The Long Weekend* [dir. Colin Eggleston 1978] and *Lost Things* [dir. Martin Murphy 2003]). At other times, it is a tempting beauty, as in *Two Hands* (dir. Gregor Jordan, 1999), when the glittering ocean of Bondi Beach entices

Jimmy into the water and away from his duties. Many written fictional texts similarly attempt to capture the essence of the natural beauty of the beachscape. For example, Drewe's short story 'Masculine Shoes' (2008) tells of a location scout for a film company. He searches many beaches and coastal towns, and eventually finds the perfect spot:

> How was it possible for a lagoon to be so clear, for a beach to be even whiter than the coral shores he'd just left? This sand was like crushed pearls […] Lustrous sands, accessible jungle, crystal seas and menacing trees; Foss couldn't snap shots quickly enough (2008, 119 - 20).

Some representations, particularly advertisements, attempt to pigeonhole the Australian beach with a focus on the natural beauty of the landscape. Images do not tend to include things like amenities; rather they reveal a preference for the illusion of wild, untamed and isolated beachscapes. There are exceptions to this; for example, Surfers Paradise, in which the inherent urbanism of the beach is impossible to remove. Images of this location tend to capitalise on the clear signs of the urban: such as recent New Zealand reality television show *The GC* (Bailey Mackay 2012), which follows the lives of Maoris living on the Gold Coast complete with flashy images of the skyscrapers along the waterfront. The naturalness of the beach is a type of myth in Australia – the beautiful beach of our imagination (the conceived) is spectacular, unmarred by humanity. This is seen visually represented in the Best Job in the World campaign video (Tourism Queensland 2011) that relies heavily on shots of Hamilton Island that are pristine, untouched beaches of glistening sand. It is an image far removed from the ordinary or everyday functionality of the beach.

This chapter explores three phenomena associated with the natural beauty of the beach: healing, escape, or spiritual connection. To begin, the chapter explores the ordinary or everyday element of healing on the beach. The beach has long been associated as a place of both physical relaxation or psychological rebirth. This is something seen in textual representations, with characters experiencing psychological relief during their time at the beach. The ocean also has physical healing properties as a result of the salt water. This everyday function of the beach is individual, and one experienced by the majority of Australians. This is analysed in conjunction with texts such as *Silver Bay* (Moyes 2007), *Two Hands* (dir. Gregor Jordan 1999) and *High Tide* (dir. Gillian Armstrong

1987). Although there are physical healing properties of the beach, this section of the chapter primarily focuses on the psychological and emotional aid that the beach can bring.

The second phenomenon to be addressed in this chapter is that of 'getting away'. The idea of 'getting away' establishes the beach as an escape, a space of difference from the everyday life, and as such, a setting to examine the self. The texts *Roadside Sisters* (Harmer 2009), *Lost Things* (dir. Martin Murphy 2003), *The Long Weekend* (dir. Colin Eggleston 1978) and *Night Surfing* (Capp 1996) will be used to explore this notion of escape, and whether it can go wrong.

Thirdly, for some texts, the beach represents a type of spirituality, a way to connect with something bigger than the self. It is when an otherworldly, transcendent plane is brought to our earthly level that the beach is solidified as a *beachspace*. The otherworldly and the everyday planes coexist, becoming an and/or/both Thirdspace. In other words, the beach can become a type of 'heaven on earth' (which instinctively allows for 'hell on earth' as well, and this will be examined further in Chapter Three): the transcendent and the everyday coexisting on the Australian beach. This is analysed in conjunction with texts such as *Newcastle* (dir. Dan Castle 2008), *Night Surfing* (Capp 1996) and *Blackrock* (dir. Steve Vidler 1997).

The Australian Beachspace examines the beach as a natural beautiful space by analysing a variety of film and fiction texts. In order to provide context for beach trips, the chapter will first explore the notion of 'getting away', particularly in texts like *Roadside Sisters, Lost Things*, and *The Long Weekend*. The idea of 'getting away' establishes what can be considered the primary motivation for viewing the beach as a catalyst for finding internal beauty. The chapter continues by exploring how the beach can be a healing landscape. This is analysed in conjunction with texts like *Silver Bay*, *Two Hands*, *High Tide* and *Night Surfing*. Although there are physical healing properties of the beach, this section of the chapter primarily focuses on the mental and emotional aid that the beach can bring. Finally, this chapter explores how spirituality – loosely defined as a higher connection beyond the physical experience of our world – can exist on the beach. The beach here becomes a space that provides a connection with a higher power beyond our

world. By exploring the role of the beach as both a space of physical beauty and also a place that helps reveal inner beauties, the Australian beach is exposed as a space of *lived* beauty; that elusive conglomeration of the conceived and/or/both perceived beauty.

Healing

The beach has long been considered to have healing powers. Traditionally in English society, during the 18th and 19th centuries, ocean water and bathing was considered a therapeutic activity. As Anton Corbin discusses in his text, *The Lure of the Sea* (1994, 69 – 70), bathing in seawater was considered a medical therapy as early as the mid-18th century. This resulted in the establishment of the beach as a healing site, especially because of the fresh air so coveted during a time of pulmonary consumption, and the emergence of the seaside resort with the advent of a railway system. During the period in which Australia was being colonised by English settlers, "permissiveness regarding 'public decency' while bathing was gradually giving way in England to a moralistic disapproval of the mixing of the sexes and the sight of the naked human body" (Huntsman 2001, 32). This resulted in the healing properties of the beach being considered less important than the crusade for public morality. Therefore, bathing was a difficult feat to manage while continuing to adhere to societal standards of appropriate dress and behaviour. The battle for swimming freedoms was a long one and has been discussed in some depth by Leone Huntsman (2001) and Douglas Booth (2001). Huntsman highlights the shift from early possibilities of public bathing (usually involving dawn or evening swimming times, changing booths, and high levels of risk of drowning or shark attacks) into swimming for leisure (once mixed bathing was allowed). What is clear from this brief historical snapshot is the power of the beach as a recognised healing location over the past few hundred years, both in England and Australia. Although the primary focus on medicinal healing has shifted, it is still accepted that a holiday leisure period at the beach is beneficial for personal health.

The beach is a natural environment, created in the space where the land meets the sea – it is accessible by land, but more usually connected to the untamed naturalness of the ocean. It is, as such, linked to health in the way that going into nature is. The concept

that escaping from city life will provide happiness and healthiness is not new, and emerged, as mentioned, from the British seaside behaviour of the late 18th century. Beach culture since then, however, has become just as concerned with the *image* of health as any actual health benefits. It is no longer enough to escape the city, but one must *look* as if one has. The most obvious sign of a beach holiday is the tan. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987, 62) suggest that a tanned body "signifies that the wearer, a city dweller, has been into nature and is bringing back both the physical health of the animal, but also the mental health that contact with nature brings into the artificiality of city life". The tan becomes an indicator, something that reveals much about the wearer. For example, it can differentiate class (the tan of a labourer is quite different to the tan of a leisurely sunbaker) and is considered an indicator of desirability. Recently, the increase in knowledge about skin cancer rates (particularly in Australia) has shifted the focus onto fake tans – usually acquired at a tanning salon with either creams or spray tan lotion. However, the message remains the same: a tanned body is a desirable one. Pale or pallid skin is considered unattractive within coastal beach cultures.

Considering the ongoing propensity to photograph fashion models on the beach, the desirability of tanned skin is perhaps of no surprise. A recent example is seen the social figure of Lara Bingle. Recently, Bingle has appeared in a reality television show *Being Lara Bingle* (Haywood 2012), a show about her life as an Australian model. Bingle's image emerged in Australia after she was the face of the "So where the bloody hell are you?" advertising campaign in 2006 run by Tourism Australia. Bingle's involvement, delivering the catch phrase in a bikini on the beach, helped establish her connection to the iconic landscape. *Being Lara Bingle* is also filmed on location at her home on Bondi Beach. The show attempts to represent Bingle as an 'ordinary girl'; her image, however, is strictly tanned and glamorous, and the show features scenes on her ocean-facing balcony. Despite the currency of Bingle's show, the idea of tanning as a popular indicator of health is not a new concept. Australia has a long standing association with beauty and the sun – perhaps a result of the hot climate the continent experiences as a whole. The tan in an outback setting, however, is quite different: it is more likely to be indicative of hard work and manual labour rather than leisure, which reinforces class differences as well.

The distinction between tanned and pale is obviously made in the fictional surfing film *Newcastle,* when the pale skinned Fergus – already different to his brother and friends because he is homosexual – is frequently shown in opposition to the tanned surfers. He is less talented and confident, and there is a clear hierarchy amongst the young men that firmly places Fergus at the bottom. His choice not to tan, or his inability to tan, is considered less worthy in comparison to the other tanned, blonde surfers. His other physical features are almost irrelevant. Regardless of his athletic physique, bone structure, hairstyle, and so on, his pale skin immediately signifies him as less attractive than the others. He is also the only surfer who chooses to wear sun safe clothing and is ridiculed for that decision.

The documented dangers of skin cancer have tended to outweigh the health benefits associated with swimming in the ocean, and generated a shift in how beachgoers use the beach. The hole in the ozone layer and the very real hazard of life-threatening sunburn has created a new era of sun safety awareness. Children are more likely to be covered on beaches, and advertisement campaigns encourage beachgoers to cover up (for example, the ongoing Sun Safety campaigns from the Queensland Government). Physical benefits are not the only improvement in health that the beach can offer. The psychological benefits of relaxation and stress-relief are considered benefits to beach trips, perhaps even more important than the physical benefits. However, the beach is certainly still associated with relaxation and the inherent healthy qualities that getting away from everyday stresses entails. Of course, Australia is not the only country that emphasises this. Hollywood in particular captures this tendency in many mainstream films: one example is *Casino Royale* (dir. Martin Campbell 2006), an instalment in the James Bond series that sees Bond recuperating in a beachside location after being tortured. The concept of the beach, particularly the salt air and relaxed lifestyle, as a place of healing and recuperation is long standing. Australia, perhaps because of its climate, is associated with the beach and healing shores.

The psychological healing qualities of the ocean are represented both obviously and obliquely in fictional texts. For example, in *Silver Bay* (Moyes 2007), the male protagonist Mike is indescribably moved by the beauty of the ocean in the coastal town and reconsiders his capitalist ways of making money from tourist developments. He

begins to appreciate the appeal of an underused small town and challenges the development plans of his boss. His first expedition on Liza's whale watching boat introduces him to a life he has never considered. Ultimately, he falls in love with Liza and the coastline and gives up his English life and fiancée to stay in Australia permanently. The beach, and the people he encounters, shows him an alternative way of living. When his life begins to fall apart in England, he returns to Australia one more time in an attempt to woo Liza and stop the proposed development that would forever change the landscape of Silver Bay. He is a changed man, according to Kathleen (Liza's aunt): "The slickness had disappeared, and a new uncertainty had crept in. He tended to ask rather than state, and his emotions sat more obviously on the surface […]. I found the new Mike Dormer rather more endearing" (Moyes 2007, 230). The implication is clear that this new Mike is a healthier one. Being in Australia, on the beach, allows Mike to reassess his lifestyle and values. As a result, he chooses to stay with Liza and her two daughters in Australia in Silver Bay. Moyes suggests that Mike has become a better person by embracing the natural coastline and forgoing the consumerist career path he once had. This text is a fairly direct example of a beach that heals; the story has somewhat overt political connotations with its distinct environmental messages, particularly in the case of the whales and the whaleboat community. Mike's character is used to portray the problems with the urbanised city and the havoc it can wreak on natural landscapes. Mike's fiancée is manipulative, his boss is unsympathetic, and even Mike's initial infidelity is glossed over as a symbol of his confusion. It was a sign that he was never suited to the city life, thus establishing an opposition between the natural and urban environments.

The healing properties of the beach in this text reveal another layer of the space that cannot be ignored. It is not just a space of natural beauty, but also a healing balm for Mike's confused life. There are stark differences portrayed between its perceived, conceived, and lived experiences of the Australian beach. The local beach in *Silver Bay* struggles with continually being conceived as something bigger than it is: it becomes a representation of a coastal haven. Although the residents do also see the beauty within their hometown, it is ultimately represented as a place that is unable to support its small businesses. Thus its importance to the town is waning despite the appreciation for its natural beauty. Silver Bay as a site falls somewhere messily in between and instead

becomes a combination of the locals' perspectives and Mike's. Yet the text still clearly privileges the natural elements of the beach – Mike's development must be stopped for narrative resolution. The beach acts as a healing agent for Mike, and therefore eradicates the city or urban influence that is so clearly considered toxic. *Silver Bay* initially presents a more complex layering of meanings on the beach, and superficially allows Mike to experience a *beachspace*, between and both the natural and urban. Yet eschewing his previous life ultimately returns the novel to a discussion of binaries rather than accepting a more rounded, thirded space.

Other texts waver between blatant and more subtle representations of the healing power of the beach. The successful horror film *Wolf Creek* (dir. Greg Mclean 2005) establishes a coastal haven in the initial scenes of the film, which ultimately makes the stark outback setting and horrific events that follow even more jarring. The safety apparent in the first scenes – in which one of the protagonists, Liz, sleeps on the sand without consequence – is so drastically removed in the remainder of the film after they encounter Mick Taylor's horrific torture in the outback. A scene in *Two Hands* sees local boy Jimmy briefly stop at Bondi Beach in the middle of a drug deal. The scene is a catalyst for the rest of the narrative because the money he is carrying is stolen while in the surf. In the moments before that realisation, however, Jimmy is shown swimming in the shallows looking unburdened for perhaps the last time in the film. His character is young, and the narrative suggests he is mixed up in circumstances that are beyond his understanding. This scene helps establish Jimmy's character as inexperienced and unaware, with his carefree behaviour in the ocean highlighting his youth and naivety. Underwater camera work allows director Jordan to capture the joy of this scene, in direct contrast with what is unfolding on the beach as it happens. The juxtaposition, shifting shots from the ocean to the sand, builds significant tension that makes Jimmy's joy all the more bittersweet. That stolen moment of relaxation, however, shows the power that the beach can hold. For Jimmy, this is certainly an example of the mental relief that the beach can bring: a moment of calm out of his stressful and life-threatening situation of negotiating with drug dealers. It is a familiar, freeing experience for many beachgoers who can relate to the sensation of letting go of reality when in the water.

Another example that captures this is *Little Fish* (dir. Rowan Woods 2005). The ending of the film sees the protagonist Tracy facing the collapse of her life: caught in a drug deal that has resulted in her father being murdered, she is facing undoubted arrest. Tracy's last moments of freedom are on the beach holding her father's body. Eventually she enters the ocean and swims, a brief respite before she must face the consequences of a lifetime of poor decisions. Leone Huntsman recognises that going to the beach and swimming in the ocean can be a type of emotional experience. She uses Dorothy Dinnerstein to explain: suggesting "in Australia the physical envelopment by moving water and near-total immersion in the 'entrancing surround' experienced at the beach provides a particularly pure example of 'surrender to the melting, flowing moment'" (2001, 9). She highlights the importance of the sensory when experiencing the beach and this is certainly something reflected in the chosen textual examples.

The sensory is a technique that some Australian authors use when describing the beach. For example, Drewe, in his autobiographical story 'Buffalo Grass' describes a moment as a boy that helped him connect with the environment in a meaningful way for the first time. He describes the scene using the senses:

> The buffalo grass under my back, the warmth of the sun, the sky's clarity, the self-satisfied ruckus of the magpies, the aroma of the Sunday roast wafting from the kitchen: this place where we were now living – at that moment at least – was perfect (Drewe and Kinsella 2010, 22).

It is a moment that Drewe says resonated with him, that it was a "valuable feeling, one worth remembering". He describes it as a "meeting of body and spirit and environment" (2010, 22), and a moment that allowed the stresses of everyday life (in this instance, a mean school teacher) to fade into insignificance. Even for a young boy, the power of the coastal landscape and the healing possibilities of the sensory experiences were unmistakable. The meeting of the body, spirit, and environment in this story is an example of the *beachspace*, an active trialectic of the three.

Yet it is not just children who benefit from a sensory connection with the environment. Helen Garner's short story 'Postcards from Surfers' (1989) is another example of the healing properties of the beach. After a presumably messy relationship breakup, the unnamed protagonist goes to the Gold Coast to visit her aging parents. The familiarity of the family holiday and the beauty of the coastal environment help her regain her

momentum and begin the process of moving on. The protagonist writes postcards to her previous partner but ultimately fails to send them, instead throwing them in the bin outside the post office. Rather than a failure, this instead gives the impression that her equilibrium is beginning to return. The stay at the beach, allowing for an immersion in "the moment" as Huntsman suggests, brings a new perspective and distance from the heartbreak; it is something that could not be achieved in the city. In comparison, Drewe's story 'The Aquarium at Night' (2008) shows the beach as almost the opposite of healing. Pablo Dyson is an Australian imprisoned in England for drug trafficking (almost by accident – a single Ecstasy tablet is found in his backpack from months previously, and he suggests that he is charged more for the sake of being an example). In the opening scene Pablo is attempting to remember details of Australia; however, he specifically avoids thinking of the surf:

> The merest thought of sea, sun and wind made his head throb and his body ache with a homesickness that reached down to the bone. What could be more removed from those vital elements than this place? (2008, 86 – 87).

For Pablo, the surf is such an important aspect of his life that the mere thought of it, during this incarcerated existence, is painful. Whereas, it is assumed, in his everyday life the surf provided a respite from the continued experience of living, in prison it is a symbol of everything that he cannot touch.

Another popular author, Tim Winton, uses the sensory imagery of the beach to great effect in many of his works. Winton himself is open about the role the beach played in his upbringing and he suggests the beach resonates with him. In his autobiographical memoir *Land's Edge,* he discusses arriving home after being away for some time, writing: "Call it jet lag, cabin fever, but I am almost in tears. There is nowhere else I'd rather be, nothing else I'd rather be doing" (Winton 1993, 3). Similarly in his novels, Winton's characters often use the beach as a touchstone, an environment that provides a healing type of relief. Bruce Pike, the protagonist from *Breath* (2008), uses the beach – and in particular the surf – as a way of regaining his perspective. The waves represent a place of safety and comfort for him, even as an aging man and after his life has not gone the way he once thought it would. Surfing allows him to regain a sense of control over his life, which at times escapes him in his career as an ambulance officer. In this instance, the beach is a reprieve from his regular life and his inability to control death.

In these textual examples, the beach is most significant in its ability to represent an 'other' – something that is far away from the realities of the everyday. However, this representation as 'other' is not sufficient to relegate the beach back to a space of binaries. As Drewe's story suggests, the beach is not just an escape: it is a complicated setting of memory and emotion. The *beachspace* is more than just an entity in opposition to the city. Instead, it draws on the experiences of the city in conjunction with those of nature and becomes an active third element that the sensory experience helps reveal.

The beach is a similarly complex setting in Gillian Armstrong's film *High Tide* (1987), particularly for the character of Ally. Ally is a young girl who lives with her prickly grandmother after her father died and her mother gave her up. Ally, however, believes both her parents are dead. Lilli, her mother, coincidentally ends up stranded in the small coastal town of Eden where Ally lives and the situation becomes complicated. Ultimately, *High Tide* is Lilli's story of overcoming her instincts to run, and instead she claims Ally as her own and resumes her role as a mother. However, their relationship is rocky, especially when Ally first learns the truth of Lilli's role in her life. Ally is a keen surfer and director Armstrong uses wide shots of her in the ocean, either surfing or just floating in the shallows (sometimes on her back, other times face down) to show the reflective and instinctively withdrawn tendencies of the young girl. Ally's experience with the water is a clear indicator of the struggles the young girl has: it is only the ocean that can provide respite for her, even with the return of her mother. For Ally in *High Tide*, the beach is a space that allows her to regain a sense of equilibrium that is missing from her daily life. She may be misunderstood by her family, but she is forever accepted by the ocean. This is an example of the beach having a different, more ordinary, type of healing power. Ally lives on the coastline and has the ability to sensually submerge herself frequently, unlike the concept of the holiday getaway which is a more temporary fix. This shifts the way that Ally interacts with the beach – it can only provide brief moments of respite throughout the day, squeezed in alongside her usual routine.

When discussing the beach as a healing site, there is a stark difference between characters who live at the beach and those who holiday at the beach. Whereas beachgoers on holiday can recline on the beach for hours in one period, the residents of

the beach must choose their timing around work or school. Thus popular times of healing and relaxation shift from locals to tourists. A more in-depth discussion of the differences between the locals and tourists in coastal communities takes place in Chapter Five.

The beach is not purely a space of contemplation and its healing properties are complex. It is not merely a placid environment, and it is also never solely a reflective space. Instead it is a shifting landscape, with a more multifaceted role to play because of the intrinsic relationship between outer and inner beauty. The physical beauty of the beach inspires a positive wellbeing, particularly in regards to mental health. As these texts show, representations of the beach often include a clear health benefit from time at the beach and interacting with the natural environment. Author Frank Moorhouse writes humorously that Surfers Paradise is where he travels to quietly suffer through his nervous breakdowns:

> When having a nervous collapse, I would load a bag with books, videos and bourbon and fly to a highrise luxury hotel on the Gold Coast, draw the blinds, lie in bed, call room service, read, stare at the ceiling fan, watch movies and listen to the breakers in the dead of night (2011, 17).

The health benefits of the beach, whether physical or psychological, then can be clearly seen.

The 'getaway' or getting away with a holiday

The beach is first and foremost considered a national holiday location. There is a romantic ideal of holidays that still pervades popular culture; that they are an opportunity to forget about ordinary life – the idea of a 'getaway' or 'getting away'. This term usually refers to two ideas, vocalised by Richard White in his discussion of Australian holidays: getting away *from* something (work) or getting away *with* something (White 2005, xv). As a result, guilt is an unfortunate yet frequent factor of holidays – guilt at leaving something behind, or not feeling comfortable with taking time away from work or home. Guilt is a powerful motivator as well, and can also be an instigator for a significant change in lifestyle. This transformation trope, which sees the holiday become a trigger for change, can be seen in numerous texts, both film and

literature. Chick-lit novels in particular suggest that holiday romances can be a legitimate way of creating change for the protagonist.

For example, Wendy Harmer's *Roadside Sisters* (2009) trails three old friends from Melbourne to Byron Bay in a campervan. The story is not primarily a romance, although the relationships all three women have experienced throughout their lives play an important part in the narrative. All three of the women, Nina, Annie, and Meredith, are unhappy with their lives, and the road trip is an experience that helps restore the bonds of their friendship. Meredith, the uptight divorcee, astonishes the others by having a fling with a man on the beach one night along the way. Harmer's prose obviously paints the experience as a moment of change:

> The waves were breaking on the rocks below and, as Meredith slipped out of her skin, they seemed to be breathing for her. A long, slow intense pulse of energy roared and peaked and crashed. Meredith was swept away into the depths. She was a mermaid swimming away from all she knew (2009, 247).

Throughout the novel, the story behind her failing marriage is revealed through the dedication and concern of her close friends. As a result, she manages to let go of her insecurities for long enough to enjoy a truly guilt-free moment of getting away from her usual life. The trip allows all of the women to reclaim aspects of their lives that they had once lost control of – Nina's weight and her secret dreams of being a chef, Annie's secret about her sister's untimely death, and Meredith's broken marriage. The holiday allows them to forget the usual societal norms that they must adhere to and relax in a previously unknown way.

Ultimately, the holiday is a way for each woman to affirm her 'inner' beauty and they regain a sense of equilibrium by the end of the narrative. It is interesting to note the contrast between the inner turmoil of the characters and the consistently beautiful landscape of the beach throughout the story. It is through escaping the harshness of the cityscape that the women are able to find their own beauty. A sentimental text, *Roadside Sisters* is an example of the tried and tested style of novel that uses a road trip and interaction with a holiday landscape as an agent of change in their lives. The beach then, as a landscape of natural beauty, acts as a type of mirror, allowing the women to realise their own worth.

In *Roadside Sisters*, the ordinary and mythic are contrasted quite obviously – the everyday lives of the women initially sit awkwardly alongside the mythical beauty of the landscape they travel through. Yet their transformation throughout the novel is reliant on the beach. While they eventually return to their city lives, it is with a newfound confidence achieved because of their experiences on the trip along the coast. Whereas the women receive much from the beach, generating lived experiences that challenge their everyday perceptions of themselves, the beach retains its mythic representation throughout. The beach does not create their beauty or worth, although it does help reveal it. *Roadside Sisters* grasps at the complexity of the beach, but ultimately falls short of representing the layered *beachspace*; instead, the text limits the beach once more to a representation of beauty that is seen as a reflection of the characters.

The concept of 'getting away' can be complicated, as the previous section established. It can involve guilt at leaving behind responsibilities. It can involve a transformative experience that allows for a new style of life – that may be a positive or negative change. White's (2005) concept of 'getting away' is limited to those who do not live in their designated holiday destinations. In this case, it refers to those that do not live on the beach; the ones who choose instead to live elsewhere and to holiday away from their familiar lives. This section then explores the idea of getting out of the city and using the beach as a type of connection to nature. There is something freeing about choosing to leave the grind of the daily life for a natural location elsewhere. The early colonial days of Australia saw inhabitants taking an English approach to the beach (as they did with many Australian landscapes, including the 'countryside'), and treating it as a seaside – a place of resorts, relaxation, and as mentioned earlier, therapeutic results – rather than surfing or swimming. Fred Gray discusses seasides (and in particular, their architectural designs) and the holiday in his text *Designing the Seaside* (Gray 2009). He suggests, "people taking holidays are not passive recipients of what they consume but instead make a direct contribution to designing the seaside" (2009, 11). He believes that holidays at the beach (although his work is primarily focused towards seaside resorts) encourage the establishment of the "cultural design" of a location. The choices made by people in "where to sit or lie, what to do there and what beach furniture, from wind breaks to sun loungers, to bring with them" (2009, 12) helps create an identity for these coastal spaces.

As such, Gray places emphasis on the word "holidaymakers"; the focus of which is on 'makers'. This is not a term that is used as much in Australia. In Australia, a more popular term is *beachgoers* and this poses a question of the apparent passivity of our interactions with the beach, whereas the holidaymaker perhaps has more agency. However, in Australia, users of the beach are still likely to bring equipment of some kind to the beach: the damaging sun alone encourages sunscreen, hats, and covers of some description. Many texts, like *Roadside Sisters*, show the protagonists bringing their requirements (in this case, a campervan) into the beach space, but appreciating it still as a natural form. Their facilities are only temporary and can be packed up at a moment's notice. There is a far more transient feeling to Australian beach sites, which is quite different to some American beaches. For instance, Waikiki Beach in Honolulu, Hawaii, is a popular beach managed by the staff of the numerous holiday resorts located on the coastline. On this beach, umbrellas and lounges available for hire are set up by staff in the morning and not removed until the evening. Comparatively, Australian beachgoers are usually responsible for and own their equipment, bringing it with them and taking it away when they leave.

Generally, in Australia, there is more emphasis on natural beachscapes than seaside resorts. There are significant exceptions to this, of course, and they will be explored in more detail in later chapters; but even in built up coastal areas, there is a distinct separation between the beach and the resort. For example, many holiday regions have restrictions on how close buildings can stand to the beach (see Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion on the Gold Coast and this particular issue). And the focus remains on the natural environment, rather than the constructed facilities to accommodate visitors. Even in major tourist destinations, such as Byron Bay on the east coast, camping is a particularly popular form of accommodation. Therefore, the term beachgoers suggests that the Australian beach culture is far more accepting of nature as it is presented rather than shifting it to suit our expectations or demands for the holiday.

Textual representations frequently reflect this more casual, less structured approach to holidaying. For example, in *Night Surfing* (Capp 1996), Hannah's extended break from

university is spent at the beach in a coastal town. She alternates her days between working in the local café and learning to surf, with no strict goals in place. Family holidays are often more structured than this, through necessity perhaps more than desire, although a text like Drewe's short story 'The Bodysurfers' (1983) shows how even family routines can shift in the wake of marriage separations. David and his new partner Lydia stay in a small cabin on the ocean with David's children. The trip is a weird combination of peaceful moments in the ocean and strange dreams and ruminations in light of murders that happened close by. The holiday is not quite the relaxing escape that David planned it to be. David in particular feels he is a passive participant of the holiday. It happens around him – he watches his children and Lydia in the ocean, he speculates on the murders throughout the night, he dreams of his parents scolding him for infidelity. As such, the relaxation aspect of the holiday passes him by as well: "Mid-afternoon he got them packed up and moving early, he said, to avoid the traffic back to the city" (1983, 129). The holiday is officially over. His internal anxieties are distinctly at odds with the natural beauty of the landscape around him. It is he who ultimately feels out of place, unable to shake the inherent busyness of the urban mindset. David is unable to just experience the trip – rather, his perceptions of the beach are marred by his conceptions of what the holiday should be. The lived experience of his holiday is a strange conglomeration of both the conceived and perceived and as such is disappointing for him. The beach's meaning has shifted for David and it can no longer be the peaceful experience of his childhood, shifting into a more complex example of the Australian *beachspace*.

The idea of 'getting away' does instinctively establish the beach as one point in juxtaposition to another. Frequently, the beach is considered a natural holiday space in comparison to the cityscape of the everyday. In this instance, the beach becomes similar to the 'Bush' in that it allows for an environmental escape. Figure 5 – An isolated beach, Fraser Island (page 64) – is an example of a particularly natural beach. This beach, on Fraser Island off the coast of Queensland, is isolated – access to the island is via barge and the sand (the island has no roads) supports four-wheel drive vehicles only. The beach itself is bare of any urban constructs, and it is not patrolled. This image shows a few four-wheel drive vehicles, well equipped for a day at the beach (this beach is not an approved camping site). The sand is pristine and fades into the natural brush landscape

not far from the shoreline. It is a peaceful beach, far from the activity of the urban beaches found closer to the cities. Its removal from the urban allows it to be a place to disengage oneself from the everyday.

The natural beauty of the beach is frequently contrasted with the inherent sinister elements that the beach may contain, and this juxtaposition is held within the beachscape itself (Huntsman 2001). The sinister elements of the beach can still be natural – yet they are not the parts of the beach that people enjoy. Chapter Three explores the beach as a badland and discusses this inherent sinister quality in more depth. Textual representations certainly embody this: sometimes showing a trip away ending in disaster, as is the case in *The Long Weekend* (dir. Colin Eggleston 1978) and *Lost Things* (dir. Martin Murphy 2003). Both these films are from the horror genre, and they each portray a holiday gone wrong that results in the death of everyone present. The picturesque beach, initially a natural haven, becomes the setting of a nightmare. It is important to note that these texts initially set up the beach as a clearly beautiful place, primarily using long establishing shots that highlight the purity and pristine nature of the landscape. Also, the beach in these texts is obviously natural, as far away from the urban city beaches as possible: in both films, the protagonists are camping, there are no facilities available, and access is difficult. This is an element of the genre, establishing the characters as isolated from society. Determining a beautiful and iconic Australian beachscape helps reinforce the juxtaposition of the upcoming horror. The landscape remains a physically beautiful place regardless of the horror unfolding within and this juxtaposition makes the beach a powerful and potentially terrifying landscape. The beach has a power for revealing a *truth* in these horror films: characters are exposed as flawed; the landscape is exposed as layered and complicated. Just as the beach worked as a mirror to reveal the inner qualities of the women in *Roadside Sisters*, so too does the beach reveal the 'evil' characters within these films.

The Long Weekend and *Lost Things* both capitalise on the classic horror trope of a trip turned into chaos, and use the beach as a disturbing setting for the nightmare about to unfold. The mythic natural beauty of the beach can be indicative of heaven on earth, and this is further explored shortly in relation to spirituality on the beach. Yet heaven on earth also allows for the binary, hell on earth, to exist. This is what the horror films

capitalise on, subverting the beauty of the beach by juxtaposing it with stories of terror and death. *Lost Things* is about four teenagers who go to the beach for a holiday without telling their parents. The film starts out innocently with the teenagers flirting and playing around with each other. Some gender stereotyping and typically awkward teenage discussions about sex ensues, but it does not take long for the horror themes to begin. The characters start to see doubles of themselves and encounter a strange man who keeps eyeballs in jars. Their deaths occur violently and inexplicably throughout the film. The teens are apparently stuck inside a perpetual limbo that leaves them reliving the unsettling experience of their ruined holiday over and over again. A mix of supernatural and physical horror, the nightmarish beach landscape is a significant element of this film. It hides and reveals crucial plot elements (such as Tracy's ring and the vanishing footprints), and director Murphy has worked to create a beach that is almost unrecognisable – as far away from traditional representations as possible.

It is particularly chilling that the frolicking fun of the first act occurs on the same stretch of sand as the murders of the characters towards the end of the film. The initially recognisable beach, once a beautiful playground, becomes a prison that traps the teenagers for eternity. The powerful contrast highlights the inherent duality of the beach and the transformational nature of the beach space, something that occurs even between night and day. The film ends with the cycle beginning again, returning to a shot from the start of their trip. It is only the beach itself that seems to know the full story – the characters, like the viewer, do not appear to grasp what is happening to them and the ending is purposefully ambiguous. They are doomed to forever relive the same sequence of events, including their deaths, over and over again. This film, like *Silver Bay*, struggles to break away from the binary representations of the beach. It starkly differentiates between the beauty of the beach and the unfolding horror. Although the teenagers were peaceful initially, as the landscape began to turn, so did they. This representation remained simplistic. While a successful *beachspace* is an and/or/both space that encompasses the serene and the sinister and creates a new type of space allowing for complexity and nuances, *Lost Things* has the beach once again relegated to either beautiful or terrifying – and unable to be both simultaneously. It is interesting to note that the film was not exceptionally successful either financially or critically, and as

The Australian Beachspace establishes, this is perhaps because of the film industry's inability to wholly capture the complex nature of the Australian *beachspace*.

It is difficult to discuss the beauty of the Australian beach without mentioning the sinister elements as well: they are two simultaneous aspects of the *beachspace* that are defined by each other as much as themselves. *The Long Weekend*, like *Lost Things* uses the traditional representations of beautiful beachscapes to increase the impact when this is interrupted. Once again, this film is set on a naturally beautiful beach, with pristine sand and rolling waves, and great care is taken to highlight its purity and isolation. Yet what separates it from *Lost Things* is the human intent of destruction. The humans intentionally, if unknowingly, defile it in many ways and the beach responds in kind, ultimately creating a terrifying environment that takes the lives of both characters. It is interesting to note that in both these films, the implication is that the humans create their destiny by disturbing the naturalness of the beach. In *The Long Weekend*, this is through the characters' choice to shoot at animals, use insecticides, and generally disturb the existing ecosystems. In *Lost Things*, Emily dabbles with supernatural things beyond her control, resulting in the murder of her three friends and their continued existence in some type of purgatory. Both films feature an interruption of the natural order that is instigated by humanity. Yet the beach in reality cannot exist in such a vacuum. In the current technological age (which is explored further in Chapter Four), isolation is no longer a true possibility, and thus human infiltration is an inevitability. *The Long Weekend* relegates the beach to either beautiful or terrifying – as the terror unfolds, the beauty of the beach is hidden. The film capitalises on the juxtaposition and the subversion of what is considered a mythically beautiful space. Yet it does not portray a successful Thirdspace. These films fall back into the binary opposition of good and evil or serene and sinister. Neither *The Long Weekend* nor *Lost Things* featured significantly in the Australian box office. In fact, of the films mentioned in this chapter, only *Two Hands* proved successful, becoming the top earning local film in the Australian box office in 1999 (Screen Australia 2011). Perhaps this is the reason for the lack of success in the box office, especially for the horror films: by forcing the beach into such a strict juxtaposition, these two films do not allow for all the complexities of the beach space and this creates a dissonance with the audience.

So far this thesis has explored the natural beauty of the beach as an accompaniment to healing and as a trigger for self-reflection and transformation both positive and negative. Yet in some texts, the beach is more than a healing space. It is not merely a space of physical beauty. It can, on occasion, transcend this and become a place that enables a connection with something higher than the earthly plane. It becomes an energetic space that combines sensory and emotional experiences, providing a type of haven that is not always found elsewhere. Huntsman (2001) likens the feeling to what can be associated with religion. For some people the beach can provide answers in a spiritual sense. It represents a connection with the ocean and nature in ways that cannot be achieved in urban landscapes. It is this aspect of the beach that will be explored in the next section.

Spirituality and transcendence

Spirituality is a broad term that covers many meanings for different people. In its most general sense, it refers to the concept of some form of belief system – something that may or may not fit within institutionalised religions, but instead acknowledges that there is something more or higher than the human race. There is something essentialist about the physical natural environment of the beach that easily allows it to transcend humanity, creating a space for people to feel connected with something higher than themselves. It is the ultimate example of a search for inner beauty, and it can be found in conjunction with the physical beauty of the beach. Places that are considered mystical are often associated with the natural landscape. An example is Uluru[1], a place long considered to have a significant spiritual presence (in particular for Indigenous Australians). The beach also allows for a spiritual experience, which is considerably different to a religious experience. Although for some, religion and spirituality are inherently linked, the spirituality that nature inspires is beyond institutionalisation. This connection with a higher power (of whatever form) and its ability to align the inner and outer beauty can be seen, if subtly, in some textual representations of the beach.

[1] Uluru is also known as Ayers Rock. In 1993, the site was granted a dual naming policy, as Uluru/Ayers Rock to adhere to the traditional Indigenous name.

Graeme Turner discusses how the landscape can act beyond a narrative function in Australian cinema, to introduce a sense of the spiritual. Using *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (dir. Peter Weir 1975), he claims, "the land operates as a source of meaning, offering a kind of spirituality or significance that is explicitly absent from society" (1993, 29). In this example, the landscape – in particular, the rock – is the victor of the film and Turner believes this is indicative of the "innate and obdurate strength and hostility of this world". It is important to note, in this example, the separation of the landscape from society; the spiritual experience is most easily identified in natural settings, distinct from the urban cityscape. The beach then can also become a type of spiritual setting for Australians thanks to its inescapably natural environment. Beaches are becoming more urbanised and this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four. However, most beaches (with perhaps the exception of the few man-made ones in existence) do have some element of naturalness that remains, and it is this that is of importance here.

Spiritual connections with the beach are not a new phenomenon. In the Romantic era, "capacity on a wild day to arouse sensations of power and awe of God" allowed for the focus to be centred on the "self" (Ford 2009, 21). This Romantic appeal of the beach "played a significant role in the shaping of twentieth century Australian beach cultures" (Ford 2009, 21). The natural beach then creates an experience for the self to transcend the immediate and move into a higher space. This modernist concept of the self is an understandable extension of the accepted ideas of medicinal benefits of the ocean. The miracle of health that the seaside could provide also generated spiritual experiences in the face of such natural beauty. Whereas the European tradition of the Romantics focused more on mountainscapes, in Australia, the ocean provided a more accessible and similarly natural geography. The gaze onto the sea is a crucial element, and Ford believes that the "spectator's response to the sea" was the important part of the appeal to the Romantics (2009, 22). Although the Romantic era has passed, the concepts behind their engagement with the ocean still linger, and can be seen in more contemporary representations. The focus on the self in particular emerges in texts that are self-reflective, such as Winton and Drewe's autobiographies. Winton especially creates moments of enlightenment for his characters within the landscape, frequently the beach. An example is *Dirt Music*, where Georgie has a clear moment of realisation at the climax of the novel where she chooses Luther Fox, the shamateur fisherman she had

an affair with over her husband and their stagnated marriage. In a complicated ending, Georgie and her husband are searching for the disappeared Luther when their plane crashes on a remote beach. Luther rescues Georgie from the inside of the plane: "Georgie Jutland drank his hot shout and let him swim her up into the rest of his life (2001, 459); but in his weakened state he soon falls unconscious. Georgie's nursing training kicks in: "Yes, she thought. This is what I do" (2001, 461). The beach is witness, cause, and setting for their life changing events. The novel finishes with no sign whether Luther survives; regardless, his decision to return to Georgie was made. The time he had spent isolated on the beach allowed Luther to re-examine his priorities.

Leone Huntsman explores the ritual of an ocean baptism. She is not necessarily referring to a religious occasion, but rather the first time that a baby is exposed to the ocean:

> Gently and gradually the baby is introduced to the water, the parent watching the baby's face and body in order to monitor and enjoy the baby's response; and if it is positive, if the baby squeals with delight rather than shock or fear, the parent walks further into the water, the baby becoming accustomed to the movement and depth (2001, 185).

Huntsman suggests that an integral part of childhood in Australia takes place on the beach. She highlights the importance of nature and human existence being at each end of the spectrum in order to create this spiritual meaning. However, she suggests that it is perhaps not possible to find "spiritual nourishment in solitary wilderness" (2001, 188). Instead, she wonders if the constant division between the natural and the urban (or spiritualism and materialism) is actually detrimental. Huntsman here is touching on the concept of the Thirdspace, suggesting that we need to accept the beach as not something separate to ourselves. Instead, the *beachspace* is a combination of wilderness and/or/both humanity, natural and/or/both urban, mythic and/or/both ordinary.

Winton is an author who comfortably describes his experiences at the beach, suggesting that absorption in nature becomes a type of conduit for spiritual connection. He discusses 'freediving' in *Land's Edge*, which is the act of diving as deep as possible underwater and staying there, immersed, for as long as possible. "You wilfully forget to breath; you sidestep the impulse and your thinking thins out to the moment at hand […] It is a religious feeling" (1993, 59). Throughout the text Winton is open about his almost

fanatical relationship with the ocean. For him, it is not merely a place he lived or visited and it is more than a setting in which to learn to surf. Instead, it is what "got me through adolescence, pure and simple" (1993, 59). He describes surfing and freediving as an escape and a better alternative than alcohol or drugs. In particular, he mentions the feeling that being underwater and pushing the body's limits brings:

> On the seabed, or gliding midwater with everything sharp and in focus and my body aching with pleasant, urgent hunger, I understand the Christian mystics for moments at a time. I too feel swallowed, miniscule, ready. The diver, like the monk, however, contemplates on borrowed time. Sooner or later you have the surface to return to (1993, 59.)

This notion of returning is significant and such an integral part of beach texts: for a local or a visitor, there is always a finite end to the beach trip. The spiritual connection with nature cannot be constant, although it can be continuous.

It is certainly documented that the natural beauty of the beach setting represents a type of spirituality for surfers. Douglas Booth suggests that the 1960s began a new, modern era of surfing. It was influenced by international events of the time, such as the Cuban missile crisis in 1963. The increase in civil rights protests and a shift away from consumer cultures was embraced by the surf culture. The concept of "soul-surfing" came into existence and "rejected high consumption, materialism and competition" (Booth 2001, 113). As a result, surfing became less contained by sporting paradigms and instead became a form of self-expression. Although since the 1960s this has shifted somewhat (surfing competitions are alive and well in today's society, highly publicised and well attended nationally and internationally), there remains an element of this in contemporary surfing representations.

It is particularly significant that spirituality is not exclusively linked to organised religions. Spirituality can emerge from personal experience on an individual level rather than through the institution of religion. Huntsman (2001, 189) provides some examples where the two meet, including a Sydney priest who also works as a lifesaver. The surfing scene is considered especially anti-authoritarian (Fiske,Hodge and Turner 1987) and thus the institutionalisation of traditional religions is not a focus. It is instead a type of appreciation for nature at its base level. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner illustrate two points of particular relevance about surfing: the first is the heavily gendered behaviour

many surfers engage in, and the other is the almost primitive connotations associated with surfing when they discuss the associated language, in particular, the use of "hunting". "Hunting is where man first denotes his mastery over nature […] it is seen as a natural activity; man hunting for food, hunting for females, hunting for waves" (1987, 69). Discussions of gender on the beach are explored in more detail in Chapter Six, which explores concepts of equality on the Australian beach.

However, this idea of dominance over nature is interesting, especially in contrast to Huntsman's ideas of sensory immersion. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner do suggest that the meaning of surfing "is to be found in the body, in physical sensation, and in the pleasure that it produces" (1987. 69). Thus, surfing is a spiritual type of experience because of its direct link to a natural environment that is untamed and free, as Fiske, Hodge, and Turner state, of the symbols of colonisation found more commonly on the beach. It is the surfers themselves, perhaps *flâneurs* of the waves, who are the conduit for the transcendental experience. They provide a means of interacting with nature at a base level when they wander the waves, letting nature guide them. It is an example of a connection with something beyond themselves. There does appear to be a complexity, however, in the concept that the surfer is both exerting dominance over nature and yet also allowing nature to work through the surfer as a type of conduit. However, textual representations of the surfers, like other texts discussed in this chapter, frequently fall short of grasping the multiplicities of the surfer and their interaction with nature.

There are many surfing films set in Australia, and Albie Thoms (himself a surfer and filmmaker) has catalogued the majority of them (2000). The 1960s and 70s was the most popular period for surfing films, many of which were documentaries, such as Bruce Brown's *Endless Summer* (1966). However, this fascination with surfing films waned during the 1980s in Australia and internationally (Warshaw 2005, 584). *The Australian Beachspace* explores only films that feature surfing and also have a dramatic narrative, and this excludes the surfing documentaries popular within the 1960s – 1970s. These narrative films, including *Newcastle, Blackrock,* and *Bra Boys*, often portray a type of spiritual experience with the beach that is achieved through the act of surfing. *Newcastle* is Dan Castle's film about a group of young surfers in the eponymous city of Newcastle, on the eastern coast of New South Wales. Jesse is a promising young

surfer with anger problems, undoubtedly enhanced by his interactions with Vince, his older and more successful half-brother. The narrative centres around Jesse and his friends attempting to escape the routine of their everyday life on a trip away. Jesse is forced into taking Fergus, his clearly out of place young brother. The trip ends in disaster – Vince is killed in a surfing accident, which nearly destroys the family. *Newcastle* has many poignant scenes occurring on the beach: in particular, Jesse looking to the ocean for answers after Vince's death. He sits on the beach at dawn staring into the waves – it is only after this encounter with the ocean that he is able to once again pick up a surfboard and reengage with nature. This resonates with the Romantic notion of the ocean gaze that Caroline Ford explores – the ocean can provide a space of contemplation about the self. In Jesse's case, despite the pain and confusion the ocean can bring (such as his loss in the surfing tryouts, and his brother's death), the connection he has with the water is enough to overcome his troubles.

The beach is quite a complex setting within *Newcastle*. It is a place of many emotions for Jesse: anger at missing out on qualifying for the surf competition, frustration with Vince's torments about his lack of ability, and finally a space of reflection and peace. Although it was the ocean that killed his brother, it is still the ocean (and Fergus) that helps him reclaim himself. For Jesse, the ocean appears to be a complex site that simultaneously is both the reason and balm for his anxieties. The ocean is not the cause of his shortcomings. Rather it is an environment that reveals them. The waves continue to roll, and it is the surfer's skill – his ability to wield the board and connect with the water on a higher level – that allows for true surfing success. In this film, the ocean and the beach reveal truths about the brothers that can no longer be hidden. Yet it also provides a possibility for transcending beyond the mundane banality of the everyday life in the coastal city of Newcastle. Although the narrative of *Newcastle* is somewhat simplistic, and the film falls within the trope of a 'coming of age' story, the beach is represented here with more agency than in other texts. The beach in this film is wholly natural, yet it is also representative of a higher spiritual connection: the *beachspace* represents a material transcendence.

Fiona Capp's novel *Night Surfing* (1996) embraces a similarly organic relationship with the ocean, although one that does not end in death. Her two main protagonists, Jake and

Hannah, are both struggling with personal demons that are stripped away once in the water. Hannah is a university drop out and Jake is a directionless resident of the small coastal town. Yet these two are not the only ones in thrall of the ocean. Jake's father, Marcus, is haunted by a nightmare of a tsunami. The brute force of the ocean terrifies him. He says, "The wave is more than water. It carries a whole universe inside it" (155). The dream is representative of his fears of losing his son as he lost his wife (she died of cancer). The ocean is more than nature in this text: rather it has the power to transcend the earth in these instances. It is a wilder ocean than shown in other texts (particularly *Newcastle*), beyond the control and understanding of humanity. In *Newcastle* Jesse and Vince both initially strive to tame the ocean beneath their boards; it is only after they both fail and Vince dies that Jesse achieves his success, working *with* the ocean rather than against it.

In *Night Surfing*, the ocean becomes an example of something bigger than people – something more immense and beyond our scope. It is not just wild nature, but a connection to something more. For Marcus, it represents more than death – it is a vastness that he cannot hope to map; another aspect of his life that he has no control over. In the text, both Hannah and Jake are surfers, and Jake – like Vince – is punished by his lack of understanding of the ocean: it is not something he can wield power over and he is surprised by its unpredictability. Jake and Hannah, perhaps because of their youth, feel a pull to the ocean that Marcus does not. For them it is beyond imagination, and this is a cause for fascination rather than fear. Although Hannah does try to 'read' the waves, the focus is on letting the wave work for her, rather than trying to dominate it. The beach is particularly distant in this text, somehow feeling uncaring and terrifying while remaining hauntingly beautiful. Graeme Turner (1993, 16) discusses the differences between exploring fiction and film and the issues inherent with analysing these two forms are notable here. Whereas *Newcastle* shows visually beautiful images of the beach, with sundrenched sand and glorious, clear water; *Night Surfing* relies on the "clearly asserted description of scene and of setting which is customary in the novel" (Turner 1993, 16). The reader's attention is directed specifically to certain elements of the scene, which perhaps shifts focus.

Regardless of the differences in style of representation, the beach in Capp's text is more sophisticated and more complex: an example of a successful *beachspace.* The Thirdspace beach here is both an ordinary part of Hannah's life, yet it also represents a mythic challenge for Jake to overcome by taking on the titular night surf. Simultaneously, the beach for Marcus transcends his plane of understanding, becoming something bigger than us and a metaphor for his fear. By using the rotating point of views of main characters, Capp has managed to represent a complex *beachspace*, one that is a combined space of myth and/or/both ordinary.

A more explicit example of spirituality that comes up in multiple texts is how surfers deal with death. Both *Newcastle* and *Blackrock* (dir. Steve Vidler 1997) feature funeral scenes for surfing characters, and both scenes take place in the water. An ocean burial is appropriate for these characters – both young, troubled men – because their lives are intrinsically tied to the water and the waves. Rather than an organised religion, the surfing community in these films believe in the power of the ocean and the spiritual experience it provides. In the case of *Blackrock*, Ricko suicides as he is being chased by the police – he has just confessed to murdering a girl after she was gang-raped on the beach. The film is a haunting one that portrays the male teenage surfing community of the town as sexist, ignorant, and ultimately violent. Yet Ricko is still afforded a 'proper' burial despite his actions. Jared, his best friend and the witness of his confession to murder, is spotted by the media at the event and is confronted by the murder victim's father: "Pushing his board out to sea like he's some kind of hero. He ain't no hero, Jared!" (*sic*, 1997). Jared's response that Ricko deserves a funeral too is met with a hysterical reaction from the victim's mother as she tries to physically attack him. The film suggests that the ocean is non-judgemental and accepts Ricko regardless of his ambiguous morals, even if society does not. Despite Ricko's apparent lack of remorse at his actions, his ceremony allows for a repentance of sorts. Significant items (his favourite t-shirt, a surf trophy) are placed on his surfboard, set alight, and sent out to the sea.

Similarly in *Newcastle* Vincent is given a beach funeral. Vince is killed in a surf rage incident when a surfboard hits him while he is underwater. His antagonistic behaviour towards his younger stepbrothers, Jesse and Fergus, makes him an unlikeable character, and in the moments prior to his death he is hassling Fergus for his lack of surfing skills.

For Vince, the implied meaning is that Fergus is lacking at *life* skills – surfing is a masculine world in this film, and Fergus' homosexuality is probably Vince's true target here. Although his death is treated as something unfortunate and accidental, it is not considered unavoidable and perhaps not even regrettable. Vince's bad attitude is shown consistently throughout the film, particularly in scenes with the mother of his child. Despite his unlikeable personality, Vince's funeral is less problematic in many ways than Ricko's in *Blackrock*. It is not questioned that he deserves a funeral; his actions, while poor, were not as morally questionable as Ricko's. A large group of surfers (only some of whom are close friends) attend his funeral and gather in a circle to send off his surfboard. It is interesting to note that in *Newcastle*, Jesse and Fergus are not in the water with the others – suggesting they cannot experience this transcendent experience yet. Their resolution comes later in the narrative, after Jesse battles with his own troubles. In both *Blackrock* and *Newcastle*, death is portrayed almost as inevitable. It provides narrative closure and also exposes the inherent danger of the beach even to the most skilled of surfers. Ricko and Vince are both unlikeable characters and their deaths are implied as necessary to atone for their sins. The spiritual experience of the ocean funeral, showing the characters' strong affinity to the water, allows for those left behind to feel a connection with something higher than themselves as they remember their fallen friend.

Surfer versus lifesaver

It is perhaps a stereotype associated with surfers that they are anti-authoritarian. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) and Booth (2001) discuss how they are frequently set up in opposition to the lifesaver, the authoritative figure on the beach. They suggest that these two figures are the epitome of the binary oppositions that exist within the beach space:

> In Australian patterns of representation of the two groups, if the lifesaver is culture, the surfer is nature; if the lifesaver is responsible, law-abiding and community spirited, the surfer is irresponsible, feckless and 'a bludger'; if the lifesaver is civilised, the surfer is primitive; the lifesaver is the land, the surfer the sea (Fiske, Hodge, and Turner 1987, 66).

It is true that the lifesaver is generally positioned on the sand whereas the surfer is positioned in the ocean. Generally, lifesavers are not associated with any type of

spirituality: they are figures more constrained by the realities of the urban landscape just behind their shoulders. Often they are contained within the shallower water rather than the depths that the surfers occupy. The lifeguard is a mythic icon in Australia. Kay Saunders states the lifeguard is an icon that emerged from the Anzac hero during the 1950s. The lifeguard (always male within this era) embodied many similar ideals as ideal soldier: a protector, a member of a trained team, an able bodied individual volunteering to serve the nation (Saunders 1998, 99). Whereas the lifeguard has continually been associated with the myth of the beach (although interestingly, the lifeguards are instinctively considered urban figures on the beach), the surfer is positioned in opposition to this: a purely natural element. The lifeguards need to stand apart from the rest of the beach goers, distinctive in their red and yellow uniforms, and their primary position is on the sand or in the lifeguard tower.

There is certainly animosity in textual representations between the two groups and this can be seen in textual representations, either through confrontation or silencing of one group or the other. An example of confrontation is seen in *Night Surfing*, when Hannah is obviously maligned by Jake when he discovers she has been training with the lifesavers. It is not completely apparent what his biggest concern is: that she did not disclose the information or the association with the lifesavers. Similarly, *Bra Boys* (dir. Sunny Abberton 2007) clearly shows the antagonistic relationship between the Maroubra surfing gangs and the police. This relationship is one that comes to a head on land rather than the ocean. In fact, the Bra Boys discuss the ocean as a place of freedom away from authority. But there is clear animosity between the two groups and *Bra Boys* portrays the police as a group that unfairly targets them on a regular basis. *Blackrock*, *Puberty Blues* (Lette and Carey 1979), and *Newcastle* instead silence the lifesaver. Very few texts are focused primarily on a lifeguard – *Bondi Rescue* (Martin Baker 2006 – ongoing) is one example, yet this is a reality television program rather than a narrative story.

The surfer tends to be a more unobtrusive figure, frequently spending hours without coming out of the water, and often blends into the natural elements. The issues between the two iconic Australian figures arise out of the authoritative position of the lifeguards and their commitment to providing safe swimming conditions to beachgoers. This

antagonism sometimes emerges in arguments over territory. Surfers, especially since the release of *Bra Boys*, are often represented as territorial over their favoured surfing areas. Chris Lilley parodies this in his mockumentary series *Angry Boys* (Lilley 2011), with his ex-professional surfer character Blake and his 'gang', the Mucca Mud Boys. Obviously drawing from representations of the Bra Boys, the series shows altercations between the Mud Boys and another local gang, the Fennel Hell Men, and follows Blake's mission to keep the Narmucca Bay territory exclusively theirs.

It is easy to see the significance of the ocean to surfers. And the spiritual elements apparent in surf funerals and reflective scenes are visible in many textual representations. Yet the beach itself, the strip of sand and the shallow water just off the coast, in these texts is primarily used as a gateway to the ocean. It is not bound by the same spiritualistic rituals of the ocean. Rather, it is a place that must be travelled through in order for the characters to reach their goal. As such, the sand can become a space for those relegated to the outside of the surf circle – girlfriends, like in *Puberty Blues* or *Newcastle*; or the spectators for competitions, like family and friends in *Newcastle* and *Coolangatta Gold* (dir. Igor Auzins 1984). Those in the ocean usually ignore the beach – a distant horizon that is of no consequence until the surfing is completed. Fergus, the younger brother in *Newcastle*, is the only one to comment on the beach when surfing: "It's wild [seeing] the beach like this" (2008). Yet he is the most unaccepted surfer – his skills are basically non-existent and his untanned physique and dark hair separates him. In comparison, Jesse is shown continually looking out further to sea when he is on land, to the ships moored off shore (Newcastle is a port city) and beyond. The beach section becomes of less importance to the surfers the more experienced they are, representing a tie to the land that cannot ever be completely severed. Yet, as a gateway to the ocean, the beach retains a high level of significance for the surfing characters.

Conclusion

The beach is a getaway location in Australia and has been established as such since European settlement. Initially considered a destination for healing and psychological cleansing, the beach holiday is now an extensive concept within Australia with the tourism industry a significant player in the national economy. The physical beauty of the Australian beach landscape is one that cannot be ignored. Yet it is not merely the physical beauty that makes the Australian beach a place of significance. This chapter explored the beach in terms of its physical beauty and also its ability to reveal beauty in others. The three major themes of exploration were the concept of the healing properties of the beach, 'getting away', and the beach as a conduit for a transcendent connection with a higher plane of existence.

Textual representations within this chapter included travel narratives, surfing films, and a variety of other texts that were concerned with the beach experience. Authors like Drewe and Winton showcased their own personal experiences with the beach and its ability to be more than just a landscape. Fictional narratives also supported this concept. This chapter showed the layered concept of beauty that the beach inhabits. It is not enough to merely explore physical beauty, but instead to use the physical beauty as a stepping stone to examining the multifaceted abilities of the beach space.

However, the complex representation of the beach is one difficult to capture in textual representations, and this chapter suggested only one that came close. Fiona Capp's *Night Surfing*, as a result of its multiple point of view narrative, managed to illustrate a *beachspace* that encompassed the ordinary, mythic, and transcendental simultaneously. In comparison, many of the other texts continued to represent the beach as a space of binaries, and perhaps this was crucial to their lack of success. *Two Hands* performed well at the box office, although the beach in the film was a minor, if crucial, element. The scene managed to simultaneously capture the respite that the ocean offered and the calamity it could bring. *The Long Weekend* and *Lost Things*, in comparison, struggled to make an impact and this could be because of the way the beach was represented merely as a setting of juxtapositions between the serene and the sinister.

The Australian beach is beautiful, yet it also functions as a tool to reveal beauty. We have come a long way from the Romantic preoccupations of the nineteenth century, using the ocean view primarily as a mirror for self-reflection. Yet, the beach still captures elements of this wild, natural space that so fascinated earlier generations. The beach can be a setting for a transformative experience as seen in travel narratives, such as in *Roadside Sisters*. It also has instinctive healing properties, both in terms of physical health (the salt water is considered a natural healing agent) and mental health. And finally, the successful *beachspace* provides a way of transcending our understanding into something higher. Surfing texts explore death in the ocean and the aftermath, and the way that the act of surfing becomes a spiritual experience itself. This chapter suggested that the beach can become a type of Thirdspace because of this transcendent ability. The *beachspace*, wandered by many, has the ability to transform, reveal, and transcend beyond the worldly level. It is something beyond the mythic and the ordinary: it is something more natural, physical, and emotional. It is a transcendental *beachspace* that is both/and/or the ordinary, lived experience of the beach and the mythic, natural representations of the beach space.

Figure 5: An isolated beach, Fraser Island

This beach, located on Fraser Island off the coast of Queensland, is isolated and an example of a primarily natural Australian beach. It is only accessible by four-wheel drive vehicles that can enter the island via barge. There are camping facilities only the majority of the island (one resort, Kingfisher Bay, is available) and this means most visitors must bring their own equipment to experience the beach space. Unlike other beaches, there is a complete lack of buildings or construction on the sand, and the sand continues beyond the frame of the photography.

Chapter 3:

Badland Beachspace: disrupted myths, fear, and crime

> *Bondi is a site, then, of the idealised Australian body and of its excrement (Davis 2007b, 508).*

The previous chapter established the Australian beach as a landscape of natural and physical beauty with the ability to bring the transcendent world to an earthly level. It explored instances where texts have found a connection through the beach to a higher place. By allowing the transcendent, otherworldly plane, as suggested in Chapter Two, to exist on our level, it opens the world up not only to heaven, but also to hell. This chapter explores the more negative elements of the transcendent power of the beach: the hellish, terrifying aspects that exist.

This chapter explores the beach as a landscape. The importance of the landscape is not new in Australia, and the 'Bush' landscape in particular is frequently represented in narratives. As Graeme Turner suggests, "there is a greater sense of challenge and thus a more heightened sense of life in narrative of the bush than those set in urban environments" (1993, 28). The landscape of Australia is often discussed in terms of myth, although it was not until Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) that the beach was included in the same way. Textual representations of fear have favoured rural or bush landscapes rather than beaches, perhaps because of the "heightened sense of life" that Turner discusses. Ross Gibson in his text *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (2002) disrupts this mythic view of the landscape by introducing the concept of a badland. He believes that landscape can hold memories and create a quarantine zone, a space feared and overlayed with evil from previous acts of violence or crime. *The Australian Beachspace* suggests in this chapter that the beach can also be an example of a badland or quarantine zone. One specific example is Bondi Beach, and this is explored in conjunction with Kristen Davis' (2007a; 2007b) research into the gay hate murders that

took place in Bondi during the late 1980s and 1990s. There are four sections to this chapter: the disruption of the landscape myth; true crime and its influence on textual representations of the beach; the role of fear of both the natural and human dangers; and how these elements generate a badland *beachspace* including a discussion of Bondi Beach as an example.

It is worth noting at this stage that much research has previously isolated the dichotomy of "serene and sinister", to borrow Leone Huntsman's terms (2001, 146). She dedicates an entire chapter of *Sand in Our Souls* to the juxtaposition. Huntsman positions the beach as a place of contrasting images – on one hand, it is a space "where one achieves a new perspective on human concerns" (2001, 146); on the other, it is a space where "destruction can suddenly intrude into delight" (2001, 149). However, this binary is too simplistic for the *beachspace* and does not include the layers of memory that Gibson believes exists on the landscape, or the combination of mythic and ordinary fears that can be revealed at the beach. As Chapter Two suggested that the *beachspace* was a complex layering of healing, spirituality, and transcendence, Chapter Three suggests the Australian beach generates a badland *beachspace* of disrupted myth, crime, and fear. Chapters Two and Three of *The Australian Beachspace* are closely aligned, especially because of the previously established binaries around the serene and the sinister. However, the beach can easily embody both of these aspects and therefore the beach is best examined as a type of *beachspace*, which allows two ideas to interweave and create a new, thirded meaning.

Landscape myth

Perhaps only the 'Bush' landscape is more inherently and internationally *known* than the beach. As mentioned in Chapter One, the beach has only recently become accepted as something worthy of scholarly inquiry in the same way that the 'Bush' has been to date. The 'Bush' has frequently captured the Australian imagination. In particular, the emergence of the ANZAC[2] figure and the focus on mateship and identity that the war

[2] ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corp, and is a term that emerged during World War I but the name was also adopted for World War II.

produced helped cement the bush as a fundamental aspect of Australian life. Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli* (1981) is an iconic Australian film that clearly links aspects of the 'Bush' lifestyle with the ANZAC spirit. The film has been subject to much scrutiny, and Jonathan Rayner's assertion that "Archie and Frank are symbolic personae embodying perceptions and interpretations of the Anzac myth" (Rayner 2000, 113) captures the mythic elements of the narrative. Bruce Bennett discusses the ANZAC myth in his book *Honing In*, suggesting that "the myth crystallised many aspects of assumed Australianness such as courage, patriotism, bush values and the mateship of Australian men in adversity" (Bennett 2006, 16). Of note here is the idea of "bush values", a concept perhaps most glorified by the bush poets Lawson and Paterson, who – although taking different approaches – ultimately refer to and help create a white settler identity. The implication of Bennett's work, and in fact, many authors make when discussing Australia, is that bush values are of more importance than the beach. Russell Ward in *The Australian Legend* (1958) particularly encouraged "bush" values, claiming the outback spirit as the prime indicator of Australian identity. It was, he maintained, a search of the "Australian *mystique*", something that apparently cannot be found in any other area of Australia except the 'Bush'. When he addressed criticisms of his work in *The Australian Legend Revisited* (1978, 171), Ward believed that "if we seek the source of the national self-image we must look, almost exclusively, to the bush". Yet this myth, or "mystique", although foundational perhaps in establishing an Australian identity that specifically referred to the 'Bush' landscape, is too limiting in this contemporary age.

The beach landscape, as has been established in Chapter One, has mythic elements. In particular, the naturalness and beauty of the beach is often considered idyllic or serene and can represent relaxation and pleasure for Australians. Yet perhaps because of its hedonistic purposes – it is, after all, a landscape used primarily for holidays rather than work – it has often been considered a less significant or less worthy landscape.

Disrupting mythic imagery

The beach landscape has many iconic elements that are easily recognised. The lifesaver is one icon, as was discussed in Chapter Two. However, textual representations appear

to challenge or disrupt some of these mythic ideas. This section will explore short stories by Robert Drewe (1983) and Helen Garner (1989), and the films *The Long Weekend* (dir. Colin Eggleston 1978) and *Lost Things* (dir. Martin Murphy 2003) to examine how they represent a more complex understanding of the beach as a landscape.

Leone Huntsman (2001, 146) suggests that the beach in Australian texts often features as a place to retreat, somewhere to "gain perspective". As seen in Chapter Two, the beach can be a safe haven, a space for relaxation and recuperation. There is something soothing about the ability to gaze at the ocean, while simultaneously being removed from its inherent dangers. The beauty of a natural vista appears to encourage people to reassess their lives, something not as commonly shown in urbanised beach texts. An example is *SeaChange* (Andrew Knight and Deborah Cox 1998 - 2000), a television series set in a small, beachside town that ended each episode with a reflective conversation between a father and son overlooking the ocean. However, Huntsman insists that the beach is only ever a temporary retreat and it is taken for granted that there will be a return to 'reality': "while the beach can provide respite from the cares of the moment […], re-entry to the everyday world is as accepted and taken for granted, as is access to the beach itself" (Huntsman 2001, 148). This is an idea that shows the difficulty of the mythic beach. Whereas the 'Bush' is a constant that provides a home and work, the beach is something frequently established as a temporary setting – even those who live in coastal towns purposefully visit the beach as part of their day. However, there are more obvious disruptions of the mythic beach in the following textual examples.

Drewe's short story 'The Silver Medallist' (1983) is a particularly chilling text that disrupts the image of the iconic lifesaver figure. In the story, Kevin Parnell (a one-time Olympic silver medallist) is a local celebrity of sorts working as a swimming coach and businessman on a Perth beach. He is established quickly as an attractive and popular character on the beach along with his also attractive daughter: "Parnell was in his element. The visitors were his types. They bantered and teased but they also observed a deference to him that he liked. Of course they were delighted to meet Geraldine, even sobered for a moment at first sight of her" (1983, 19). Things change suddenly in one

afternoon when Parnell attempts to return a swan to the sea, fails, and is attacked on the ear. The embarrassment is too much and he drunkenly retaliates by setting the clubhouse on fire. Parnell's downfall, however, is made all the more tragic and uncomfortable by the revelation in the final paragraphs that he had been sleeping with his daughter Geraldine for three years. During the day, Parnell is the very image of virility and success that is associated with the lifesaver. He is an Olympic medallist, attractive, and a strong athlete – the iconic type of image captured in Max Dupain's photograph *The Sunbaker* (1937). And yet, beneath the outer layer is an immoral character. Drewe's story challenges the traditional representation of the masculine champion of the beach by creating an incestuous relationship that occurs secretly under the surface. Parnell's image, and the image of the lifesaver's image alongside it, is forever tarnished – at least to the reader: the implication is that Geraldine's secret (told to the narrator's sister) remained known to very few.

The Long Weekend (dir. Colin Eggleston 1978) , a horror film, purposefully plays with both the assumption of re-entry to reality and the innocence of the natural beachscape. In doing so, it challenges the iconic beauty of the landscape and inhibits the beachscape with agency. The film is an example of the monstrous landscape, a theme of Australian cinema in particular, that is explored further shortly. In this example, the film's two protagonists do not understand the natural beauty of the environment and its animals. Their careless behaviour antagonises the landscape. As such, the beach "fights back" and in the subsequent horror neither Peter nor Marcia survive. The film's opening sequence establishes the traditional, iconic image of the beach but immediately contrasts this with ominous music that builds throughout. *The Long Weekend* exploits its initial equilibrium with multiple wide shots of untouched beachscapes, swimming ducks, flying birds, Marcia lounging comfortably on the sand, and Peter surfing in the clear and clean ocean water.

The Long Weekend does not only rely only on the obvious cruelty of their behaviour to interrupt the idyllic setting of the beach. As the narrative unfolds, their relationship is revealed to be unhappy and continues to disintegrate as the audience learns of Marcia's affair and subsequent abortion. From the beginning, the tension between them is palpable and their anger is often redirected to the surrounding landscape and nature.

Signs of the anger and disrespect of the two build throughout the film: for example, before they leave their suburban house, Marcia wants to leave the dog behind overnight without care; and on the highway Peter hits a kangaroo and carelessly does not stop.

Their marriage quickly deteriorates as they stay at the campsite. As their actions continue to harm elements of the surrounding nature, each scene is tinged with the sinister threat of nature "fighting back" at their careless and exploitative actions. Their actions become more frantic, ultimately culminating in their physical separation. The beach is no longer a space of retreat to gain perspective on a difficult marriage; instead it is full of fear and uncertainty. Peter, now alone, spends a fearful night surrounded by noises – it is because of this that he accidentally shoots Marcia with his spear gun. When Peter then tries to escape, he is run over by a truck when the driver is momentarily blinded by a bird attack. Both are presented as the victims of their own behaviour. By misappropriating and disrespecting the natural landscape, the beach has fought against them.

Although the film is tied to a certain degree to its genre's tropes, such as isolation, the beach is a definite example of an active landscape. This is similar to Martin Murphy's *Lost Things* (2003). In this horror film, four teenagers wind up trapped within a strange limbo. The beach setting in this film is actively keeping them ensconced in a strange dimension of unreality. The beach holds the memory of their deaths – it allows them to uncover pieces of the puzzle (for example: Tracy's ring, the footprints on the sand) as the narrative progresses. The film portrays the beach as idyllic in parts, like *The Long Weekend*; however, this is quickly and categorically disrupted. The beach is not merely beautiful, but it is not only horrific either. Both *The Long Weekend* and *Lost Things* disrupt the stereotypical image of the serene, beautiful landscape that plays a part of the beach's mythic connotations. Yet they continue to isolate the beach into a combination of binaries of beautiful and evil through their use of the generic conventions of horror: the resolution of both films returns the beach to the mythic ideal – the evil is not allowed to coexist once its purpose has been reached.

In the horror films mentioned above, the sinister aspects are represented as shocking because of their stark contrast to the serenity of the beach. It is the presence of hell

alongside heaven where each aspect is only as powerful as its alternative. This can be also layered with Edward Soja's theories of the real and the imagined. For example, the serene and the sinister are both powerful because they each play on the real and imagined fear and knowledge of the beach space. Soja suggests that the real and imagined separately are not enough to thoroughly capture the spatial complexities of a Thirdspace. This is certainly the case for the *beachspace,* in which the real and imagined are interwoven and cannot exist without the other. The idealised body of the bronzed lifesaver or sunbaker, for example, is contrasted simultaneously with the possibility of paedophiles being discovered lurking behind changing blocks. These people can occupy the space at the same time, or can in fact be the same person. For example, one of Drewe's short stories, 'The View from the Sandhills' (1983), is told from the perspective of Paddy, a recently released sex offender. His crude language is confrontational and immediately establishes a disruption of the beach.

Paddy wanders the beaches, spying on nude bathers through his binoculars and taking photos of couples having sex: "I've seen many a strange sight at the beach. Many's the fuck I've snapped over the years, though they've dropped off lately since nudism's become popular" (1983, 87). He rhapsodises at length about the female body, and reveals he is primarily motivated by sex: "And I do like a big nipple, brown for preference, something with a bit of suck in it" (1983, 86). Paddy's narrative is a chilling one because of his apparent lack of social morals and the insinuation that he is far from the only one succumbing to the "urge" to watch and photograph nude bathers: "You have to get up early or all the good spots are taken. The same dozen or so turn up most days" (1983, 87). The ending of the story reveals Paddy's sudden reappearance into society after imprisonment for 23 years. He physically attacked a woman, although Paddy's memory is shrouded in denial making the details unclear: "It's odd but these things happen. The remarks got to me, sure, the jibes, but it was the screaming that made me go black and when she fell she hit her temple and it bled a lot. It was more of an accident" (1983, 92). Clearly a man with questionable values such as Paddy's (despite maintaining that "all my ones have asked for it, you can look it up in the evidence" [1983, 92]) represents some of the very worst of sinister beach activity. His disconcerting point of view is particularly abhorrent because of his casual disregard for socially accepted behaviour.

Helen Garner's title story from her collection, *Postcards from Surfers* (1989) is another textual example that challenges standard beach images. The story sees the unnamed protagonist retreating with her parents to Coolangatta (at the Gold Coast) after a devastating break-up. The protagonist is searching for Australian postcards to send to Phillip, her ex-partner. One particularly exemplifies the darker side of the tourist beach:

> Another card in several slightly differing versions, shows a graceful, big-breasted young girl lying in a seductive pose against some rocks: she is wearing a bikini and her whole head is covered by one of those latex masks that are sold in trick shops […] The mask represents the hideous, raddled, grinning face of an old woman, a witch…. Is it simple, or does it hide some more mysterious signs and symbols? (Garner 1989, 8).

It is this duality of images, forced together on the one postcard, that challenges the mythic and iconic beach. It exposes the undercurrents of the beach *within* an attractive representation of the serene. The mask covering the girl's face intentionally challenges the homogenous ideal of feminine beauty, that of a big-breasted young female. Catriona Elder highlights that postcards are often places that showcase the discrepancies between male and female representations on the Australian beach: "Then there are the shots of the surfer out on a wave and the slightly risqué shots of topless women on the beach with some slightly lewd caption" (Elder 2007, 66). The gender inequalities on the beach space are familiar and, unfortunately, usual in many beach advertisements and representations of gender are discussed further in Chapter Six. However, in Garner's story, the mask is deliberately a very sinister image that conjures up terror and fear. The female in this image is not only passive and sexualised, but also scary. The intention behind the postcard seems complex and a little frightening, especially because the mask covers the face of the girl and thus creates a faceless figure with attention focused solely on her body.

In Garner's narrative, the protagonist buys postcards and fills them out to send to her ex-partner, only to throw them out in the bin next to the post box. The postcard then becomes a worthless item – no longer available for use having already been written on. The beautiful images of the beach are discarded, overwhelmed by the emotions tied up with the recipient. And yet perhaps the postcard suggests more about the unseen and broken relationship the protagonist recently lost. Although the reasons are never given, the postcard hints at ideas of passivity and worthlessness for the female gender. What is

obvious is that the serenity of the beach image is punctured and a horror is revealed underneath – a possible link with the deteriorating of the protagonist's relationship. Also within this story an underlying fear of aging permeates. The central character watches her mother and aunt and comes to the realisation that they are now old: "They are two old women: they have to keep one hand on the tap in order to balance on the left foot and wash the right" (Garner 1989, 5). This is another example of a disruption of the idealised image of the beach, one that generally relates to youth. The beach in this story is a space that reveals truths about age and regret – it is not necessarily a space only for youth, beauty, and love, but also a place to retreat to after losing what was once so dear. The experience exposes the changing reality of her family, and also the beach. It cannot exist as it always has in her mind. The mythic image is clearly disrupted in this narrative text.

The mythic image of the beach then is disrupted in these examples of narrative texts. It is perhaps not surprising that there is such confusion of the iconic beach in texts considering the proliferation of 'real' crime that happens on the beach.

'Real' crime

The beach, like any landscape in Australia, has certainly featured as a crime setting both in fiction and real life. One concept that appears in texts is the ability to cover up a murder under the guise of accidental death: for example, in *The Empty Beach* (Corris 1983), the protagonist Cliff Hardy is investigating the supposed death of a man who drowned in the ocean. However, the victim is a strong swimmer and detective Hardy suspects all is not as it seems. Examples of amateur crime writers' publications (for example, *Perils Under The Pandanus* [1999], a Crime Writers Queensland collection, and *The Elephant in the Sea* [2008], from the Noosa Crime Writers) suggest a fondness for the beach in crime. The beach is an interesting location for criminal activity; it can provide isolation and is a place where people are often not closely watched (it is the ocean that is considered the most pressing danger rather than the sand).

Real crimes on the beach can have long standing repercussions. Some of the most harrowing are those that remain unsolved. Two infamous unsolved mysteries are linked to beaches in New South Wales and South Australia. In January 1965, Christine Sharrock and Marianne Schmidt were found murdered on Wanda Beach in New South Wales. The bodies were "battered, stabbed and sexually assaulted" (*Dunes to be sifted in murder clue hunt,* 1965). The two girls were fifteen and their killer has never been identified. Their bodies were discovered in the sand hills. True crime appears to have had a clear impact on Drewe's writing. *The Shark Net* (2000) is Drewe's semi-autobiographical novel that details his early life in Perth. At the time, the serial killer Eric Edgar Cooke was active in the city, inciting fear in the community. Cooke was arrested and convicted in 1963 and was the last person hanged in Western Australia in 1964. The first page of Drewe's novel introduces the sense of chaos and panic circulating Perth:

> Our peaceful neighbourhood was in an uproar, and for its own reasons my family was in a state of shock. A boy I knew had been one of the murder victims. One of the murder weapons had belonged to another friend of mine. Everyone seemed to know someone who had been killed (2000, 2).

The eight murders form the structure of the novel. They take place in the waterside Perth suburbs and the subsequent fear permeates through the entire town. Eric Cooke is eventually convicted of multiple murders years after the crimes. The true murders bring authenticity to Drewe's work and his experience linking crime and the beach shape his later representations of the beach in his fictional works, as can be seen in his short story mentioned earlier, 'The View from the Sandhills' (1983).

Drewe's memoir, although framed by the murders of the period, is also an account of his childhood – life as a Dunlop worker's son; holiday trips to Rottnest Island; first love and getting married; and his burgeoning career as a journalist. *The Shark Net* generates a strange feeling of the city of Perth as a layered, complex space. The landscape seems to hold onto the more ominous moments, and this is especially revealed when Drewe uncovers information about a murder in 1893. Drewe feels as if the landscape is imprinted with an ominous layer of history, and that despite changing the street names it is impossible to erase the notoriety "so completely from the public memory that they might never have been" (Drewe 2000, 174). The crime remains, regardless of how the city attempts to ignore its past. This resonates with the reaction of Drewe's family when he impregnates his nineteen-year-old girlfriend when he is eighteen. His mother finds

them an apartment on the outskirts of Perth: "In the green apartment we went into exile. Up here we were less likely to cause embarrassment to others and incite gossip. I was sure this had been my mother's thinking when she found the place" (2000, 202). Although attempting to erase or disguise what had happened, Robert's mother and simultaneously, Perth, struggle to contain the inherent presence of the problem – pregnancy and murder. *The Shark Net* is a story in which crime plays a crucial role, and yet the focus remains on the personal and Drewe's relationships with his wife and family. Interestingly, the title of the memoir is rather ambiguous. Shark nets are designed to keep sharks out of beach areas. Yet, in this instance, the net also acts as a type of cage, keeping Drewe inside and unable to easily escape from the restrictions society places upon him. And the net – designed to keep killers out – has failed in the sense that the murderer, Cooke, successfully avoided detection over such an extensive period of time.

Another unsolved mystery is the disappearance of Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1967. Although it is now considered most likely that he drowned, his disappearance sparked discussions of murder and other mysterious circumstances fuelled by the political climate of the time (Tobin 2007, 44). Holt was swimming when he disappeared, not on the beach, but the idea that he walked into the ocean and was never seen again is chilling because of its ambiguity. This uncertainty is what differentiates between death by murder and death by accident. Beaches are accepted as dangerous places, but fear of nature is very different to fear of crime. Beachgoers are often aware of the dangers that nature represents. And yet beaches, like many other Australian locations, are often still places of criminal activity as well as leisure spaces. Films sometimes perpetuate this idea by suggesting beaches can be places for clandestine meetings, drug deals, and disposing of bodies (for example, *Little Fish* [dir. Rowan Woods 2005] or *Two Hands* [dir. Gregor Jordan 1999]). An element that contributes to these possibilities is the way the beach is simultaneously vast and intimate: people share the same spaces yet can remain isolated and individual. The beach encourages a shared space of function and usage; however, there remains a separation between people. Like other public spaces, the beach allows for high numbers of people to cross paths without engaging with each other. This is capitalised on in representations of crime on the beachscape.

It can be suggested that the very openness of the beach environment makes critical observation more of a taboo and therefore difficult to regulate. Obvious lurkers are discouraged but many strange people can circulate the beach without fear of discovery because of the sheer size of space and population.

Another ongoing mystery is the disappearance of the Beaumont children from Glenelg Beach, South Australia in 1966. Despite extensive searching of coastal suburbs, beaches, caves, and drains the children or their bodies were never found. The children's father was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* saying "Somebody must be holding them against their will. They would have come home by now, otherwise" (*Three missing children feared taken* 1966). As the search continued, reports surfaced of a blonde man seen "frolicking" with the children. This is a story that haunts Australian parents to this day. A childhood memory of my own is of my mother cautioning me not to stray too far from her on the beach, as she was terrified of me being kidnapped – a fear that was passed on from her parents when she was a child during the 1960s. In *Time's Long Ruin* (Orr 2010) Stephen Orr re-imagines the disappearance of the Beaumont children in the Melbourne suburb of Croydon and creates a fictional text loosely based on fact. As in the real crime, Orr's victims, Janice, Anna, and Gavin Reilly, are last seen playing with a blonde stranger and then never arrive home. As time passes, the beach becomes the scene of a crime with police and volunteers littered along it. One chilling scene shows the police questioning a woman about the mysterious blonde man:

> 'Was he their father?' the woman asked.
> 'No. We don't know who he was.'
> 'Oh dear.'
> (2010, 216).

The "oh dear" illustrates the moment of the woman realising a strange man had found the children, was seen in public with them, and yet she and no one else had realised the danger they were in. The invisibility of the ordinary is a chilling aspect of beach crime that disturbs the peaceful day time beachscape. The uncertainty of what happened is often the worst part – the Beaumont children (or the Reilly children in Orr's narrative) are never discovered and the motivation for their apparent abduction or disappearance is never known. The *imagined* fear that fills the gap when the real fear stops is terrifying.

Crime is an unfortunate part of the beach experience, even though it is one that is underplayed in mythic imagery of the landscape. Its presence disrupts the iconic space and generates a seething undercurrent that bubbles below the surface. The presence of crime also creates a necessity of fear on the beach space – fear of both the natural environment but also fear of manmade crime. Fear crosses the boundaries between mythic and ordinary, allowing beachgoers to experience both imagined fears on a grand scale, and local, specific fears of particular beaches or people.

Fear

Fear is both a real and imagined, or mythic and ordinary concept. This section explores some examples of how fear is represented in textual representations, and how this continues to disrupt the mythic or imagined beach. It also discusses the differences between day and night time on the beach, as the two periods represent significantly different types of fear. Fear has a long history in Australia in a variety of forms. O'Reilly and Vernay (2009) examine some of these in literature and film, highlighting the shifting types of fears – from the natural landscape to the more recent fear of terrorism. A distinctive fear in Australian society is that of invasion, in which the beach plays a significant role. This section explores more personal or individual fears rather than those of a nation. It examines the interactions of the real and imagined fears and how textual representations negotiate the combination. It analyses different ways in which the beach is portrayed negatively, including natural and human dangers.

One way that the beach is portrayed negatively is via association with ocean fauna. The creatures of the sea generate a significant element of fear because of the real and often uncontrollable dangers that they present. Many dangerous animals reside in Australian waters: sharks, jellyfish, and stonefish are just some. The fear of an imagined shark (often exaggerated in our collective understanding because of negative media representations of shark attacks) can be as difficult to overcome as the fear from sighting a real shark. The fear instigated by humans on the beach is more commonly seen on the sand itself rather than the ocean. Fear of losing children or being molested lingers most obviously in the aftermath of such an event (such as the disappearance of

the Beaumont children). And the beach itself is often represented with agency and the ability to embody evil itself – a space that is both/and/or the real and imagined fear.

The Australian landscape as a monstrous space, full of fear, is not a new idea; in fact, the 'Bush' landscape has long been considered dangerous. The Gothic influence can be clearly seen in the 'new wave' of Australian cinema (such as Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* [1975] and George Miller's *Mad Max* [1979]). As Gemma Blackwood suggests: "What these antipodean gothic films seem to emphasise are the corrupting dangers of the alien Australian landscape" (Blackwood 2007, 490). Australian horror films capitalise on this concept frequently, and Blackwood explores the isolation and uncertainty of the outback landscape represented in *Wolf Creek* and the inverting of the classic larrikin figure in the horrific character of psychopathic Mick Taylor. In comparison to the outback, the beach is not always an isolated space. It is also susceptible to "corruption" by negative influences, particularly the acts of humans. The beach, as highlighted in *The Long Weekend,* is not a passive space: rather it is reactive and perhaps more dangerous because its threats can be an everyday experience for many Australians.

The beach at night is a significantly different scenario to the day. While the water is clear, inviting, and refreshing throughout the day, at night the dark water can be menacing, the rips unpredictable, and the beaches unsupervised. Although the lack of vision and supervision is a legitimate fear, ultimately the beach is the same at night. Yet the perceived fear increases significantly after dark. The traditional zones of beach usage shift at night, with generally less people except for a few walkers on the esplanades and brave swimmers. The lifeguards are off duty and the area is dark. The sinister feels much closer. An example can be seen in Figure 6 – Cottesloe Beach, Perth (page 95). This photograph shows the popular beach at night. What is a haven during daylight hours becomes a very different scene at night. The familiar becomes unknown. The water in particular here takes on a darker, more menacing feel. Its depths are mysterious, and it is more dangerous to navigate through rips and currents without visual aid. As such, the beach at night is a more dangerous place. The night beach then, is significant because of its transformation from the day. The meaning of the beach shifts as well, and the functionality is certainly different from day to night.

The beach space is also represented in texts differently from day to night, shifting to a more menacing setting. In Fiona Capp's *Night Surfing* (1996), Jake's dream since his mother died is to surf at night, hoping it would provide some enlightenment into what death meant and where she had gone:

> Death, he had decided, was something that he could sidle up to and inspect, if he had the courage to do it. It meant going against all his fears and forgetting what might lurk in the water ahead. Only by forcing himself into the darkness could he get close to where his mother had gone (1996, 105).

The dangers are obvious, and when Jake attempts night surfing at the end of the novel, his fears are realised. He is separated from Anton, his surfing mentor, and caught in a tide sweeping him out towards the Bass Strait.

> How could this have happened after all their careful plans? Months of talk and mapping the tide patterns, waiting for the right wind and swell. They had it down to the smallest detail… The forecast hadn't predicted a gale, but there was more to it than the wind. There was something about the current they hadn't struck before. What had happened to slack water, the lull between the tides? (1996, 210).

The novel ends with Jake having survived the treacherous rip waters, although weakened, and attempting to slowly paddle towards the shoreline. It is an ambiguous ending, because there is no guarantee that Jake survives.

Capp uses the dark as a place of fear, where secrets emerge and contemplation begins. Marcus, Jake's father, dreams at night of an enormous tsunami wave, "a black wave that dredges up the sunless depths". The recurring dream is a foretelling of Jake's fate when he is swept away into the dark ocean. In the aftermath of their break up, Hannah (Jake's ex-girlfriend) walks the streets at night before finding her way to Jake's house and meeting Marcus there, seeking comfort by sleeping alone in Jake's bed. Local café owner Ruben senses his wife's distance even before she presents him with divorce papers: "He can't follow her now. It's as if she's stepped into absolute darkness, to a place where his mind can't go" (1996, 180-1). Night in *Night Surfing* is a metaphorical representation of fear, both real and imagined, and the murky, impenetrable ocean is an extension of that fear. The ending of the novel, which comes after Jake and Hannah's relationship ends (and Ruben and Marie's marriage ends), suggests that we can only move forward once conquering the darkness and fear. For Jake, that fear was of death and the unknown, and after surviving the pull of the night ocean rips and swells he is ready to face the

coastline and emerge from beneath Anton's shadow. In this novel, the beach is a gateway to the transcendent world beyond our earthly reality. It is the night beach that entices Jake into the danger of night surfing. Marcus' dream of the tsunami is of a black wave – impenetrable darkness. This is in direct contrast to the heavenly space apparent in Chapter Two.

Capp's representation of night does not include dusk and dawn. This is an important part of the beach, with dawn sometimes providing a type of 'newborn' mythology. Yet it can also be a dangerous period. Drewe's short story 'Stones Like Hearts' (2008), shows this when Brigid reflects on how her now unfaithful husband had proposed to her on Shelly Beach:

> The same beach where Max had gratefully proposed to her after they'd made gritty love in the dunes twenty-three years before. It had been a warm summer evening, one of those long West Australian dusks redolent of pungent coastal plants, dried kelp and sun-baked limestone, with an occasional faint whiff from some small dead reptile somewhere back in the dunes (2008, 81).

The image is in some ways romantic, with the pair making love on the sand after the proposal. And yet the "pungent" smells of the coast and a "dead reptile" provides a glimpse into the perhaps already rotting elements of their relationship. Dusk signals the beginning of the night and the time for safety in the water is passed. Dusk stories are more likely to take place on the sand rather than in the water.

Yet horrors still wait on the sand: it is here that Tracey is gang raped and murdered in *Blackrock*. Similarly, dawn is often shown as a haven for surfers. Bruce and Loonie in Winton's *Breath* (2008) learn to surf with Sando, an ex-professional surfer. He picks them up at dawn and begins "what he called our appointments with the undisclosed" (Winton 2008, 85). Dawn on the beach suggests a new beginning, the end of the uncertain darkness when the sun once again breaks through the night. The fear of what happens in the darkness passes and the beach returns once more to that serene space of nature. It is also important to note the differences of the west and east coast – the east coast sees sunrise over the ocean, whereas the west coast sees sunset. This does appear to sometimes change the significance of dusk or dawn depending on the coastal setting. The dark is a setting frequently associated with fear (although much crime occurs on

beaches during the day). Once again, that fear is a strange conglomeration of real and imagined aspects, allowing the beach more agency as a badland of horror.

Badland beachspace

Ross Gibson believes that landscapes hold memory over time, and Australian beaches have witnessed much bloodshed. In particular, the beaches have seen much confrontation during the colonisation/invasion of the Australian continent by European settlers. Many of these were violent incidents that heavily favoured the settlers. There has been much written about the massacres of Indigenous people. Ross Gibson (2002) suggests that this subsequent struggle between Indigenous Australians and Anglo-Saxon colonisers immediately created areas of badlands within the collective memory of the landscape. For example, he describes the stretch of road between Mackay and Rockhampton, colloquially termed the 'Horror Stretch', "an immense, historical crime-scene" (Gibson 2002, 1).

In the case of the 'Horror Stretch', Gibson suggests that the past has become mythologised. He uses the concept of myth in a similar way to Fiske, Hodge, and Turner: the myth is a type of unified concept that carries significant weight in society. It is something considered inseparable from the location it describes, which in this instance is the 'Horror Stretch'. In the 1970s, the murder of the Weckerts, skydiving tourists shot as they slept in their car, made headlines around the nation. Gibson cites the surrounding media coverage as perpetuating the myth of the area. He says: "the *event* of the Weckert murders was produced by more than the mood of the times, but the *story* and its avid consumption and circulation were overwhelmingly a product of communal sentiment" (2002, 173, original emphasis). It is the constant retelling of the story that keeps the associated feeling alive. One of the earliest events of the 'Horror Stretch' is an Indigenous massacre at the hands of Native Policeman[3] Frederick Wheeler, believed to have shot or drowned some 300 Aboriginal people. Gibson discusses the Goulbolba story, making a note that the lack of evidence and eyewitnesses meant there was no

[3] A term used to describe specific police units that consisted of a white leader and Indigenous recruits.

investigation at the time. “But ‘unreliable’ as it is as conventional history, the Goulbolba tale is significant because it is so generic” (Gibson 2002, 67). Few records appear to remain; a newspaper article from 1899 states: “An eye witness of the battle gives some particulars which strikes a sympathetic chord, notwithstanding the apparent justice of the punishment” (*At War With the Natives*, 1899) and then details some of the event. However, this article is thirty years after the event, suggesting that although the evidence was long gone, the story remained. The stories of the ‘Horror Stretch’ are passed through word of mouth and media representation, creating a mythology that surrounds the badland space. This shares similarities to beach events like shark attacks or kidnappings. In the event of a shark attack, the media representation ensures that the exact location is pinpointed. It is significant that the known incidences of shark attacks linger after the fact. This is also the case with child abduction, or any other known crime – the sense of fear and danger can remain and is retold into new narratives (as can be seen with Orr’s novel [2010]). A badland can become part of an urban legend and beaches are not immune to this treatment.

An example can be seen in *Blackrock*, Nick Enright’s play and the subsequent film adaptation, which was allegedly adapted from a true story (the murder of 14 year old Leigh Leigh in New South Wales). There is some controversy surrounding Enright’s initial play, *Property of the Clan* (Enright 1994), the later developed play *Blackrock* (1995) and then the subsequent film version (1997), because of Enright’s reluctance to admit to being inspired by the true event (Brien 2009). The film tells of a young girl gang-raped and murdered by numerous boys on a beach during a party in Blackrock, a fictional coastal town. *Blackrock* is an interesting example because of its generic story. Although, for some audiences, it is inextricably connected with Leigh Leigh and the true event, for a younger generation it is something that is inherently Australian yet not tied to one location. As such, it has the power to speak to multiple coastal demographics. The horror in this instance is not quarantined specifically to a certain beach because of Enright’s choice to make the setting a generic, fictional coastal town.

The ‘Horror Stretch’ section of Central Queensland witnessed Indigenous massacres well before it witnessed more recent deaths. These events haunt the area, and as such, Gibson suggests the landscape retains it within its ongoing narrative. Indigenous and

European conflicts and Indigenous texts are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six of *The Australian Beachspace*, which explores the idea of egalitarianism in Australia. But of particular significance to this chapter is how this initial contact between the two groups foreshadows how the beach landscape is retaining memory from the beginning of 'modern' Australia. After the initial English contact and settlement along the coastlines, the beach continued to be a place of tragedy because of the inherent natural dangers such as strong rips and sharks. Initially, beach knowledge was limited and thus bathing was encouraged at dawn and dusk – both times notorious for sharks. Patrolled beaches were unheard of, and reading the ocean's rips and currents was not yet an established science. But it is not only natural dangers one must be aware of on the beachscape; in contemporary society beach crime ranges from petty theft to murder. In this sense, the beach remains a place of constant conflict.

The representations of the beach in some textual examples show how the beachscape can permeate through the memory of authors, directors and an audience. The narrative storytelling that Gibson is referring to relies on the role of memory. It is the *retelling* of the story that helps perpetuate the sense of a badland landscape. This is perhaps most strongly seen in the memoirs of Drewe and Winton (*The Shark Net* [2000] and *Land's Edge* [1993] respectively), who both interweave the beach alongside recollections of their childhood on the west coast of Australia. However, not all memories of the beach are necessarily positive ones. Drewe, as mentioned previously, recounts his memories of a serial killer active in Perth that Drewe met as a young court reporter. Some textual representations of such negative events can have the power to dissuade people to use the beach again.

It is this fear that Drewe captures in his story 'The Rip' (2008). In it, John Bingham is on a beach with his daughter Sophie the day after a fatal shark attack. The undercurrent of fear is obvious – it is the fourth attack of the season and the beach feels strange: "Suddenly his imagination was uncomfortably vivid. The unnatural green and bronze sunset, the perpetual threat of nature and the abruptness of savage chance engulfed the beach in a sombre mood" (Drewe 2008, 188). The trouble begins when Bingham enters the water to assist a woman struggling out of her depth. Sophie is anxious – the shark threat alarming her – and when he returns, she has run away. The story ends with

Sophie not to be found and Bingham confusedly calling "Nothing happened" in a vain attempt to reassure her. The uncertainty of why she left and where she has gone is chilling and dovetails with abduction stories easily. This story carries such an impact both because of the imagined fear of the sharks and then Bingham's actual fear at Sophie's disappearance. The *beachspace* embraces the combination of real and imagined fear and becomes a space of and/or/both – a place where fear is inherent.

Viewing landscape as a reactive space, a space that can reflect memories and past events back onto a narrative, is the central concept in Gibson's work. He maintains that the landscape can hold horror despite the passage of time. When discussing Rockhampton and the 'Horror Stretch', he posits: "There is some spirit of place here, something made by nature and culture scratching a distressed landscape together" (Gibson 2002, 49). It is the patterns of social activity that lie on the land, still etched into the surface years after the event.

A badland is not purely a space of memory, however. As in the case of the 'Horror Stretch', in order to become a badland, the power of memory must become collective. Often, the media assists in creating a badland through its retelling of stories. An important element of a badlands myth is the concept that it is a "quarantine-zone" (Gibson 2002), a closed space where the evil is consigned that remains separate from the rest of the country. The quarantine-zone of evil is very much in opposition to the spiritual aspect of the beach, which is encouraged in all beaches. By separating the unwanted, evil sections, the rest of our country by comparison is therefore allowed to be controlled, normal, and free of that evil. The quarantine-zone *contains* the badlands. Gibson believes only by gaining maturity will society no longer need a badland: "until the fantasy of one simple, singular nation is dispatched and the fear of difference is overcome, the hybrid vitality in our places and peoples will be wasted. Our landscapes will continue to go bad on us and we will continue to make legends from them" (Gibson 2002, 175). If Gibson is correct, that suggests that while Australia stands as a country with a fear of the unknown or those who are different, the continent will continually create badland zones. Examples can be seen in detention centres like Christmas Island, which has had contentious incidents throughout its history, including the *Tampa* boat incident of 2001 (in which a vessel loaded with asylum seekers was refused access for

disembarking by the conservative Howard government) and the detention centre riots in 2006. A place becomes associated with the bad history that it holds, and Christmas Island is undoubtedly connected with its messy history of illegal immigration and asylum seekers rather than its beauty as a location. The Australian beach landscape can be seen as unified because it surrounds the entire country. The beach is frequently idealised as an idyllic whole. Yet individual beaches do not get this same treatment. When incidents happen, they are named and therefore the badland is localised, providing the "quarantine zone". Once the space is named, becoming a place, the inherent history and memory inhabits the experience. Another example of this that is touched on again in Chapter Six is the Cronulla riots of 2005, a period of race-fuelled conflict that incited violence in Sydney beachside suburbs.

Frantic media coverage frequently surrounds shark attacks on Australian beaches. Although arguably a 'natural' death (as opposed to a murder), sharks infuse a similar sense of fear in the public. Helen Tiffin calls this the "shadow of the shark" and suggests that Australians have an inherent fear of the animal that results in "disproportionately widespread fear and sensationalist media coverage" (Tiffin 2009, 77). A beach space can become a 'badland' following a shark attack and a shark sighting will close a beach temporarily. Yet, shark attacks (especially fatal ones) are statistically very rare. Tiffin argues:

> Paradoxically it is actually *because* shark deaths *are* so rare that the image of the shark as a malign, inscrutable force, metonymic of the universe itself, persists. Like death, the shark's unheralded attack can occur at any time, and like death itself, the shark seems cold and remote, erupting into life from 'nowhere' to carry the victim off (2009, 80, original emphasis).

The shark is a symbol of fear, made recognisable by stories and movies (such as *The Reef*) that take advantage of the "malign, inscrutable force" of sharks that Tiffin mentions. The media representation usually exacerbates the fear and danger of the situation. *Bondi Rescue* (2006 – ongoing) occasionally plays on the fear of sharks. One episode (2009, episode 5.09) sees the show combining footage of a dark shape in the water with ominous music and a voice over narrative suggesting that a shark may be amidst the swimmers in the water. Eventually, it is revealed that the 'shark' is actually a seal. Yet the fear of the shark is amplified as an authentic threat, with one of the lifeguards saying "If a shark wants to bite you, it'll bite you". It is this ingrained fear that

can turn a specific beach into a badland after a shark attack. We see this in Drewe's short story 'Stingray' (1983), in which the protagonist falls into panic after being stung by an unknown creature (not a shark, but one of many deadly Australian sea creatures). Suddenly he realises that he has been poisoned: "This country is world champion in the venomous creatures' department […]. The land and sea abound with evil stingers. It suddenly occurs to him he might be about to die" (1983, 160). When the panic and the fear sets in, that is when the badlands and associated stories begin to emerge.

The idea of a badland myth forms an underlying sinister edge to the more tourist friendly beach seen in postcards and advertising. However, this sinister edge does exist, and was perhaps best exemplified by the startling suddenness of the death of Steve Irwin, environmentalist and animal lover, who was killed by a stingray in 2006. Huntsman supports this idea even within nature itself by suggesting: "The catastrophic storms, the dark shapes that lurk below and beyond the sparkling surf, are as real as the delights we more often prefer to associate with it" (Huntsman 2001, 152). In January 2011, Tropical Cyclone Yasi wrecked havoc on the tourist areas of North Queensland, and showed the very real fury of the sinister ocean with massive tidal swells and localised flooding (Walker and Elks 2011). Storms can change a beachscape with its vicious winds by shifting sand, scattering debris, and felling trees. Nonetheless, a storm can act as a type of rebirth and the beachscape emerges fresh the next day. Yet the destruction remains and the horror of that event becomes one retold.

Bondi Beach: the ultimate badlands

This section specifically looks at the famous and iconic Bondi Beach. Internationally well known, it is, Davis argues, an example of a badland beach – a quarantine zone. By examining both 'real' crime and textual representations, this section highlights how the mythic image of Bondi can be disrupted by the existence of a badland. Where Gibson uses the term badlands, Davis (2007a) draws attention to the underbelly of the beach. This term has become commonly used in Australian popular culture since the introduction and incredible success of the television program of the same name. The original series, titled *Underbelly* (Haddrick, Gawler, and Packard 2008), follows the

Melbourne gangland war. Since then, the franchise has continued with a total of four seasons. As such, the term underbelly is almost a cliché in Australia, yet Davis' intent is clear. The beach's dark underside, the elements not seen during the day and missed by tourists or casual visitors, is the "seething underbelly".

The iconic Bondi Beach has been the setting of vicious crimes as well as a tourist destination. Kristen Davis has published on the gay hate murders committed around Bondi Beach during the 1980s and 1990s and the following court cases (2007a, 2007b). The Bondi murders were a series of linked crimes uncovered by a police inquiry nearly a decade afterwards. All the murders were of homosexual men and all were committed in the Bondi Beach/Tamarama area near Sydney, New South Wales. The murderers were a group of men (with female assistance) with homophobic motivations. Davis proposes that the tourist haven of Bondi Beach cannot exist without the seething underbelly existing underneath: "Bondi is a site, then, of the idealised Australian body and of its excrement" (2007a, 508). Davis tracks the events of the murders and the criminals prosecuted and identifies that Bondi Beach itself played a vital role in the situation. She suggests that the dominant cultural images of Bondi are purely heteronormative and that "In the case of the 'gay gang murders', the ideals of Australian heteronormative culture are constituted by a literally violent expulsion of queer bodies from the domain of (hetero)normativity" (2007a, 502). It was because the men so obviously represented a *non*-normative image of Australian culture, in a place known predominantly for its representation of Australian culture, that they were murdered.

Bondi Beach, according to Davis, is a landscape that represents the normative culture of Australia and actively attempts to conceal any alternative. This event is an example of how the serene and sinister can occur alongside each other, for such an extended length of time. Without the continued existence of this less desirable horror badland, would Bondi remain the exciting and popular icon it is? Gibson's badlands theory is a little muddier here; how can such a popular strip of the beach be quarantined? The beach is not just a quarantine zone of fear, and it is not just an iconic, infamous beach. Bondi is a *beachspace:* a trialectic space that encompasses memory, fear, and the serene-and/or-sinister simultaneously. It is complex, layered, and impossible to contain within a

limited or marginal definition of binaries. Most significantly is the fact that the badlands *beachspace* exists alongside and amongst the transcendent *beachspace* of Chapter Two.

The establishment of the serene and sinister juxtaposition is therefore quite clear, and it can be quite obvious in fictional representations. The serene and sinister aspects of Bondi Beach in particularly are more humorously exposed in Gregor Jordan's *Two Hands* (1999). Jimmy, the young protagonist, has $10 000 to deliver as a job to Pando, the local mob boss. When the recipient is not home, Jimmy proceeds to go for a swim at Bondi Beach during which time two children steal the money. The scene on Bondi is the catalyst for the film's plot, and it comes about through Jimmy's carelessness. Seduced by the scenic beauty of Bondi, Jimmy leaves the money buried in the sand. The voice over narration builds this as the moment of change for Jimmy: "Sometimes small things can magnify themselves into big things… one careless decision will affect the way the rest of your life will unfold" (Jordan 1999). Jimmy dives into enticing surf and sinks beneath the surface. When he emerges again, he looks to the shore and sees the sand disturbed, prompting a panicked search of the area and neighbouring sunbakers' bags. The rest of the film traces Jimmy's attempts to escape the gang and find $10 000 to repay his debt.

Although only a short scene in the film, the beach plays a pivotal role. It is both a place of seductive beauty and criminal activity (which happened, unlike other representations, in broad daylight amongst the watchful eyes of many beachgoers). The beach reveals the enormity of Jimmy's mistake by letting the money out of his sight. What is undoubtedly a relaxing holiday for many beachgoers becomes a very bad day for Jimmy. The beach does not care that Jimmy is a young, perhaps misguided, man who garners the audience's sympathy through his good looks and lack of thinking things through to their conclusion. Nor does the beach care that the street kids who steal the money are presumably not looking to donate it to charity. The beach observes, provides, and remains apparently impartial; the money is stolen and Jimmy left in a life threatening situation – yet, it was 'dirty' money to begin with, and it is possible to read the beach as actively expelling the money from its shores. For Jimmy (if no one else) the beach in this instance becomes a personal badland. Interestingly, this film is one of the more successful in Australia: it is number 40 of the top 100 Australian earners in the

box office (Screen Australia 2011). The film wavers between comedy and crime, which perhaps made it so appealing to an Australian audience.

Another of Drewe's stories, 'Stingray' (1983), mentioned earlier, is another tale of Bondi Beach. The story begins with David swimming in the surf after a long day. Unlike the earlier surfing examples, in this instance, the beach is providing a rebirth or purifying experience at the *end* of the day rather than at dawn. The surf cleanses David, washing away the grievances and annoyances of the day. However, in one moment, the beach becomes a place of fear when he is stung by what he assumes is a stingray: "He is anticipating another arched wave, striking out before it through a small patch of floating weed, when there is an explosion of pain in his right hand" (1983, 159). The pain becomes the focus of the story, and David is forced to the hospital in an attempt to alleviate his discomfort and allay his fears after his initial poison panic. Importantly, David is not represented as a foreigner, tourist, or someone unused to the dangers of the surf. Rather, he was once a lifesaver and loves the beach, noting the irony of such a person dying as a result of nature (1983, 160). The ending simultaneously reveals the good and bad of the situation: the sting becomes a catalyst for a new relationship but is revealed as a sting from a butterfly cod, a far more dangerous fish than a stingray. The beach in this story is purifying and refreshing, and also dangerous, dirty, and murky. Drewe, once again on Bondi Beach, captures the simultaneous serene and sinister aspects.

The reality television show *Bondi Rescue* (Baker 2006 - ongoing) is adept at emphasising the juxtaposed sinister and serene at Bondi Beach; in fact, the show capitalises on the dichotomy. The show's premise revolves around the lifeguards on Bondi, and as such many episodes feature swimmers needing rescue amongst the strong currents and rips while other beachgoers swim obliviously nearby. The show relies on the dangers of the beach to create situations requiring rescue, thus producing the entertainment of the show. For example, one episode (2009, episode 5.09) follows the search for a missing six-year-old child. The lifeguards are shown searching the beach, alternating between wide shots of a bustling Bondi that emphasise the enormity of the search, and close ups that highlight the lifeguards' tireless efforts checking children and asking members of the public if they had seen the boy. In the central tower, one

lifeguard states after 45 minutes of searching: "You start to feel like something sinister might have happened to him".

After the boy is safely found near one of the children's pools, the narrator claims, "Bondi's charms lured Roy away from his parents". It is the seductiveness of Bondi that is the culprit, suggesting that the beach's beauty is tempered by an inherently sinister, alluring quality. This is an example of the how the beach takes on properties of evil: the power to seduce and entice beachgoers away from safety and into the unknown. The lifeguards do reiterate the safety precautions of spending time on the beach, frequently stating that swimmers need to be careful and aware of their own limitations. *Bondi Rescue* only covers the day time hours, however, because the lifeguards are on duty from 7am until 7pm during the summer. The program does not illuminate Bondi's nightscape, which, as Davis suggests, is not quite the same as the day. There are some exceptions. For instance, an episode that includes New Year's Day has the lifesavers working late trying to save irresponsible, drunk swimmers who are reported missing by their friends. In this example, however, the danger of swimming after dark and intoxicated is specifically highlighted. *Bondi Rescue*, for all its drama, is ultimately a packaged snapshot of the beach that is attractively encouraging for international tourists.

The beach, despite being a public space, can be a private setting that allows people to remain hidden – in fact, the presence of so many people can allow someone more invisibility than an isolated suburb. Foucault's idea of the Panopticon works on the basis of "he is seen, but he does not see" (1977, 200) and this concept can be seen on the beach. The Panopticon introduces the idea of self-surveillance. Foucault's initial description was of a prison that allowed for one prison guard to oversee a large number of prisoners through specific designs of the space. As a result, the prisoners' awareness that they were being watched eventually negated the need for the guard's existence: the prisoners instead governed themselves. There are some similarities in the way the beach space is established with this concept. As it is a public space, the beach is therefore open and accessible to all. In other locations (such as in city areas), it would perhaps be a completely non-regulated space: it is the introduction of the natural danger of the ocean that generates the need for such surveillance at all (most

predominantly seen in the form of lifeguards). The concept of surveillance on the beach, however, is complicated: lifeguards primarily watch the ocean from their towers in order to track swimmers in trouble (just like the guard of the Panopticon). However, some beaches also have CCTV cameras as well. In the above episode of *Bondi Rescue,* the lifeguards and the public cover all elements of Foucault's idea of surveillance – the 'guards' or lifesavers in the tower and the self-surveilling 'prisoners' or other beachgoers on the sand in this instance have let the boy slip through their grasp.

In general, the beach relies heavily on self-surveillance. Other swimmers assist in flagging lifeguards when someone is in trouble; other beachgoers help search for missing children. However, the primary experience on the beach is still personal. We accept on the beach that other people are there, but we rely on the communal experience of purposefully *not* watching others in order to provide an illusion of privacy. Users are encouraged to watch their friends and family, and their own belongings. Many beaches have signs, such as the one seen in the film *Two Hands* (1999), saying "Thieves go to the beach too […] keep your belongings safe". Although strangers are often within a small distance of one another, it is not unless there are signs of obvious distress or discomfort that it becomes obvious something is amiss.

Yet the beach itself cannot be contained that easily. There is too much play between the serene and sinister aspects of the beach space that prevent easy categorisation. Bondi, of all Australian beaches, is perhaps the most internationally recognised and is one that can be seen so visually in filmic examples like *Two Hands*. A thriving tourist destination, Bondi is a space that embraces visitors and locals alike. Davis (2007a) suggests that the Marks Park region changes dramatically from day to night; it is used as a picnic area or lookout during the day, however, when night falls, it becomes a recognised gay beat. Davis states: "The sanitized 'tourist-friendly' and 'family-friendly' images of Bondi, which function as an icon for Australian national identity, are built upon a structure of homophobic violence" (2007a, 1). Therefore, Bondi's normativity is interrupted by the introduction of homosexual behaviour within the beach space. Bondi has a duality of identities from day to night, and the murders were a reaction against the perceived 'otherness' of the homosexual night time activities. The murders were ultimately discovered, and Bondi Beach revealed a seething homophobia within its sands.

The Gold Coast region, and its most iconic beach Surfers Paradise, is another example of a complicated beach space. It is worth noting that the Gold Coast's increasing crime figures makes it another example of a beach badland, a place that allows for the less desirable to emerge on the sands. In 2011, the Queensland Police called for immediate action in response to what has become termed the "Gold Coast Crime Wave" in the media. The Gold Coast became the feature of media reports in July 2011 after the Queensland Police Union called for more force in the Gold Coast. This came on the heels of the murder of Police Officer Damian Leeding, killed in the line of duty (*Family to turn off shot officer's life support*, 2011). Multiple murders since then have contributed to the negative reputation of the Gold Coast.

To counteract the damage caused to the Gold Coast's tourist image, the Gold Coast City Council has instigated the "Surfers Paradise Nights" program. The program is designed to improve the functionality and safety of the Gold Coast at night, while still encouraging the party lifestyle it is now renowned for. The council is touting the program as one that: "bring[s] this cultural precinct to life. The city meets the sea in a unique night experience combining clubs, pubs and restaurants that together create the enticing and exciting experience that is the essence of Surfers Paradise" (Surfers Paradise Nights 2012). The program offers incentives, such as free entry and discounts for certain venues and services, and offers safety information and a "chill out zone" – a space designed for immediate care and first aid. The program is still new and the effect of its implementation is still uncertain; however, its aim to "introduce you to the new, glamorous side of Surfers Paradise" shows the desire to improve the Gold Coast's image. The upcoming Commonwealth Games, successfully won for the Gold Coast in 2018, will also generate shifts and improvements in the Gold Coast's reputation. The Gold Coast, like Sydney during the 2000 Olympic Games, will require significant additions of sporting venues and improved services, such as transport. It will be interesting to examine the Gold Coast after 2018 and see if it is a much changed city, perhaps less maligned as the crime capital of Australia.

Conclusion

Davis suggests that Bondi is simultaneously both the image of a perfect, iconic beach and the place of hatred, fear, and crime. In this chapter, the beachscape is exposed as not merely a space of retreat or reflection, but rather an inherently reactive space with the ability to reflect back onto the narratives set upon it. This underbelly of negativity disrupts iconic or mythic representations of the landscape in Australian texts.

Immediately established as a space of conflict for modern Australia after the colonisation by European settlers, the beach can be a dangerous space. Huntsman (2001) acknowledges both the serene and sinister aspects of the beach, and Davis (2007a; 2007b) focuses on the inherent simultaneity – that one cannot exist without the other. The dangerous, seductive elements of the beach landscape are as much a part of the beach as the beautiful ones. This chapter has established that the *beachspace* is a complex setting of real and imagined fears, and can be in certain areas a quarantine zone, isolated from the rest of the country.

The *beachspace* has been established as a landscape that can retain memory using Gibson's theory of badlands (2002). The beach is a space heavy with expectations from millions of visitors – and as a result, it actively reflects behaviour back to the narrative, as seen in *The Long Weekend* when nature attacks the couple after their reckless and endangering behaviour. Night and day have very different meanings on the beach: day is a bright, attractive, iconic time filled with beach users, whereas the night is scary, intimidating. This returns to Foucault's ideas of surveillance and the concept that we are most invisible when beachgoers are surrounded by crowds – when we *assume* we are most under surveillance.

This chapter, by examining theory and texts of the beach, has explored the inherent dangers within the beachscape and the role memory plays in creating badland beach spaces (especially Bondi). The beach is not passive; rather it actively reflects behaviour because it retains the memories of past instances of badland beaches. The *beachspace* is a place of real and imagined fears, mythic and ordinary experiences. It is a badlands *beachspace* that exists alongside the transcendent *beachspace* simultaneously – neither

exists without the other. The Australian *beachspace* is complex and difficult to contain, but despite attempts to ignore negative aspects of the beach, the "seething underbelly" exists and will continue to flourish.

Figure 6: Cottesloe Beach at night, Perth

This is a photograph of Cottesloe beach in Perth, Western Australia. A popular beach during the day, it becomes a different scene in the evening. Although mostly well lit, the darkness of the ocean and the lack of people make it a less familiar place. At night the beach space shifts and becomes harder to navigate and more dangerous to use.

Chapter 4:

Urban Beachspace: the spaces between the natural and the urban

> *The dazzling beauty of Bondi's clean, golden sand and the exuberant roar of its blue surf overwhelm the clutter of nondescript buildings and tourist tat that fringes it, thank God, and always will (Gemmell 2009, 29).*

The Australian Beachspace thus far has established the well-accepted physicality of the beach landscape. Chapter Two established the healing and spiritual properties of the beach while Chapter Three discussed how the mythic, iconic beachscape was disrupted by darker representations. Human interaction with the beach inevitably introduces the urban world to the natural sands of the beach. It is the rise of human usage of the beach that has generated the urban sprawl beyond the city and the suburbs and into the beach. The city sprawl is not a new concept and the suburbs have their own identity beyond country and city representations. As Nathanael O'Reilly notes in his thesis *Between the City and the Bush: suburbia in the contemporary Australian novel* (2008, 1), Australia was one of the first suburban countries in the world. O'Reilly's research indicates a significant lack of representation of suburban stories, especially in long form (although poetry and short stories are more popular). Interestingly, this is also the case for the beach – a landscape that is not frequently included in novel length Australian works. *The Australian Beachspace* has explained some of the negative connotations that the beach has in Australian national identity. Often the beach is considered hedonistic, unlike the Bush which is linked with a discourse of responsible work ethic. O'Reilly also indicates the negative connotations of "suburbia", and the difficulties in finding or defining a "typical Australian suburb" (2008, 9). The suburb and the beach then share some similarities in their lack of representation and the difficulty in defining them in Australia. Yet the beach, unlike the suburbs, has inherent and unpredictable natural elements that cannot be ignored. By allowing the beach to encroach on the outer

suburbs of the city, the *beachspace* becomes a space of both natural and urban elements intertwining and coexisting.

The urban sprawl of the Australian city and the introduction of the urban was first discussed by Fiske, Hodge, and Turner, who suggested, "the beach provides a physical bridge between the city (culture) and the sea (nature)" (1987, 59). It becomes an "anomalous" space that lies between land and ocean. Catriona Elder also discusses the suburban beach in her text *Being Australian* (2007). In particular, she references the Cronulla riots of 2005 as an example of the tensions that exist between locals and non-locals, and the normative beach identity as white and Western. The relationship between locals and non-locals and the riots are discussed in more depth in Chapters Five and Six respectively. However, Elder's interest is in those beaches that are considered extensions of the suburbs and she suggests these are usually the province of locals rather than tourists. An example she uses is the television soap opera *Home and Away* (Bateman 1988 - ongoing), which shows "a homely place filled with locals, in particular young people, who enjoy the freedom and ease of beach life" (Elder 2007, 303). The focus of the show is not on visitors, despite the significant numbers of tourists on real beaches in Australia. Yet there still remains a difference between the suburban and the urban beach. The suburban beach is closer to the natural beach than the truly urbanised beaches, as an extension of the outer city suburbs. For example, the beach at Redcliffe – an outlying suburb of Brisbane – is a very different beach to the manmade Southbank beach in the middle of Brisbane's CBD. The way the space is used is quite different, as are the demographics of beach users. Two examples of very urban beaches that are discussed in more depth in this chapter are Bondi Beach (in Sydney, New South Wales) and Surfers Paradise (in the Gold Coast, Queensland). Both are internationally renowned as exciting tourist locations.

Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987, 55) state: "Manly [Sydney, New South Wales] or Cottesloe [Perth, Western Australia] are the beach made city-like, suburbanised: the wild surf beaches, often unnamed, untamed, are the alternatives offered by nature". However, Fiske, Hodge, and Turner suggest that some beaches – particularly Bondi and Surfers Paradise – "accept both meanings simultaneously, effectively setting up a new paradigm which is made up of natural 'beachness' and 'Australian metropolitan

beachness'" (1987, 55). The conceptual understanding of the beach has, by this theory, shifted from a natural coastal location to a space that embodies both natural and metropolitan elements concurrently. It is important to note that many Australian beaches, especially those around the coastal capitals (the South East Queensland area; Melbourne beach regions, Perth beach regions, and Sydney's stretch of coastline), actively embrace the urban and natural elements simultaneously. Beaches are rarely just a stretch of sand and the waves in these regions. Beach spaces can include car parks, toilet blocks, surf clubs, restaurants, and shops. They are usually patrolled extensively by lifeguards and most are under some form of surveillance, sometimes technological (for example, the security cameras that patrol Bondi Beach). Some beaches also have exercise equipment littered along the boardwalk (for example, the Gold Coast beaches have a variety of benches and wooden equipment with instructions designed for an assortment of exercise techniques). Playgrounds are also found at many urbanised beach sections, emphasising the leisurely and family sense of the space.

The urban and the natural then are a dichotomy that is instinctively linked together at the beach. It is interesting to note that particularly urban beaches tend to use structures in an attempt to control the unpredictability of nature. For the purposes of this chapter, *The Australian Beachspace* examines three specific examples of beach structures and urbanisation on the beach space. The first is environmental structures and how the introduction of human made tools and equipment, such as fishing nets, are considered to have a negative effect on beach and ocean life. Secondly, this chapter explores the rise of technology on the beach and the advancements in safety that have occurred alongside a decrease in privacy. And finally, the beach can be a setting for competitive sport and manmade structures are often built to encourage the spectatorship of sport on the beach. The tendency for humans to urbanise beaches in this way, to provide a structure, reveals the inherent uneasiness that we have for the natural unpredictability of the landscape.

Textual representations of the beach often shift distinctly and disparately between natural, isolated beaches and more urbanised ones. This chapter focuses on textual representations of the urbanised beach in juxtaposition to the more natural examples, particularly focusing on arguably the two most urbanised beaches in Australia: Surfers

Paradise and Bondi Beach. Some examples examined include films such as: *Blurred* (dir. Evan Clarry 2002), *Goodbye Paradise* (dir. Bob Ellis 1981), and *Coolangatta Gold* (dir. Igor Auzins 1984). These are all films set on the Gold Coast. Frank Moorhouse, an acclaimed Australian author, wrote an article in *Q Weekend* (a supplement of *The Courier Mail*, Brisbane's major newspaper) about the Gold Coast and storytelling. He claims, "the only city that has captured the collective imagination of writers, filmmakers, and the Australian oral culture of told jokes and anecdotes is the Gold Coast" (2011, 16). It is indeed a city with a simultaneously glamorous and seedy image, especially within the recent police task force Hydra established to combat the "bikie gangs" of the region. *The Courier Mail* currently has an interactive map illustrating a timeline of activity, and information about the known gangs involved under the heading: "Bikie Inc: Organised Crime on the Glitter Strip" (Callinan and Robertson 2012). Consistent violence and ongoing police enquiries have established the Gold Coast "bikie gangs" as a considerable problem for the region.

Using textual examples in conjunction with examining the structures of the beach, this chapter reveals the Australian *beachspace* is an urban/natural hybrid that exposes the inherent fear the urban has of the unpredictable and uncontrollable natural elements.

The urban beach

In order to highlight the role of the urban beach in Australia, it is first important to define it. Generally, Australia is known to be a country of city dwellers because most of the population lives in the six capital cities. This image is inherently ironic, considering the continued national and international advertising focus on the isolated outback and empty beaches. The major cities, with the exception of Canberra, all lie on the coastlines (specifically the eastern and lower western coasts), and therefore our population is mostly coastal dwellers. The entry point of the European colonisers was the coastline; Captain Cook sailed along the eastern coast mapping the land as he went. O'Reilly (2008, 11) suggests the colonies of Australia were examples of the farthest suburbs of Britain. As the country was colonised, the original Indigenous inhabitants were subsequently forced out of their land. The Europeans did not understand the complex land ownership system employed by the Indigenous. As R. J. L. Adams says:

> Perusal of territorial maps of Koorie peoples in many areas of the continent, drawn up by nineteenth century European observers, for instance, shows that virtually no two are similar. Koorie land ownership and even clan names do not readily conform to the precise parameters Europeans like to place upon them (2000, 26).

The takeover of land was of prime importance to the European settlers, and this is obvious in the shifting patterns of Indigenous land habitation – predominantly moving inward to the country's centre as the European colonisers settled primarily in the coastal regions. Geoffrey Blainey, in his text *The Tyranny of Distance* (1983), suggests this was because of the role that sea transportation played in the initial colonising of our country, considering in the 1820s, "most early Australian towns faced the sea and won most of their wealth and gained their importance from the sea and its trade" (Blainey 1983, 118). The trend of looking outwards and using the ocean for wealth continued throughout settlement, resulting in our current population density being tied to the coastlines.

It is therefore not surprising that contemporary urbanisation in some form has pervaded many beach spaces: buildings, restaurants, and lifeguard clubhouses can be seen on the majority of beaches across the country. For example, the popular beachside suburb of St Kilda in Melbourne has a long esplanade running alongside the beach (see Figure 7 – St Kilda, Melbourne on page 129). In Melbourne, the city life sprawls further onto the coastal edge. In this photograph (taken on a rainy day in winter, hence the lack of people), the beach is clear on the left and the constructed esplanade on the right leads past buildings in the distance. It is on the one hand a very natural beachscape – the sand is unaltered, for instance. Yet it shows distinct signs of urbanisation as well, such as the manmade boardwalk that runs along the right hand side of the image. Also positioned behind this image is Luna Park, a fixed theme park with a rollercoaster that overlooks the ocean. Ann Game suggests that a new reading of the nature/culture opposition so often found in Australia is that of the outdoor life/suburban environment dichotomy (1990, 108). The beach, she suggests, is a space that falls between this division – not quite suburban, but not untamed wilderness either. St Kilda is perhaps an example of this – not quite suburban but definitely not a wilder space either. Regardless of Game's assertion that the beach is somehow between the division, there does appear to be a clear divide drawn between urbanised and natural beaches, creating a binary again. Yet

this does not account for the complexity of the *beachspace* representation, which is more than the space between natural and urban: it is both these spaces and more.

Many researchers have explored the beach as a marginal or liminal space. Leone Huntsman (2001) believes that a key element of the beach is its place as an edge. Her discussion of Winton's fiction in particular focuses on the use of boundaries and margins and the way the beach is represented as a liminal space. While Huntsman suggests that Winton's writing, and subsequently the beach, "constantly crosses and recrosses boundaries – between land and sea, city and bush, shallows and depths, the past and the present, life and death, the natural and the supernatural" (2001, 133). This thesis, however, suggests that the beach is not just a cross-section of these binaries but all of these elements together. The beach is not purely a space of margins and liminality: it is not only the narrow strip between these ideas, rather it is a combination of the urban and the natural, one bleeding into the other and being incomplete without each portion. The *beachspace* is not an edge to the country, the city, or the ocean. It is a space not remarkable just because of its position between the land and the ocean. It is defined by itself, not what it adjoins. Although it is a shifting space, because of its tidal movement, it is not a temporary zone. It is an example of Soja's Thirdspace: the *beachspace* natural and/or/both and urban. It is impossible to exclude either element entirely from the Australian beach in this contemporary era.

It is not enough to suggest that the beach is merely natural or urban: instead the two merge and create a new way of understanding the Australian beach. This is similar to Lawrence Buell's definitions of ecocriticism (1999). Like Soja's thirding, Buell suggests a triad approach is essential when examining a text through an ecocritical lens: "concerning 'place', not simply in the light of an imagined descriptive or symbolic structure, not simply as social construction, not simply as an ecology but all three of these simultaneously" (1999, 707). The imagined, social, and ecology are all connected, and of equal significance. This can be applied to the *beachspace*, and helps present the Australian beach as more than its natural environment, more than the urban construction edging it – instead a combination of all.

The natural beach is now adorned with urban elements, such as lifeguard towers, toilet blocks, and playgrounds. Technology continues to improve and play an important role in beach safety; for example, in the form of surveillance cameras, rescue helicopters, improved lifeguard rescue boats, and advanced shark nets. The implications of this intrusion of the urban on the natural can be concerning in regards to the environmental concerns it raises.

Environmental concerns

With the intrusion of the urban on the natural, social concerns arose surrounding the question of environmentalism and ecocriticism. The longevity of the natural environment is of great concern in Australia, and some of the textual representations of beaches reflect this. There are dangers that technology can help erase, but unfortunately it can also bring erosion, animal cruelty, and loss of identity with it. Of course, sometimes natural causes like a king tide, cyclones, or floods can attribute to natural erosion. However, human involvement can also contribute. A poignant example is in Andrew McGahan's political thriller *Underground* (2006), where the main protagonist, Leo, is experiencing a cyclone in one of the units in his doomed hotel. He reflects, as he awaits his death, on the irony of his construction being brutally washed away considering his disinterest in environmental care at the time of building: "We wanted a pristine beach for the punters, not mudflats. We wanted open ocean views from the rooms, not the backs of old dunes covered in scrub" (McGahan 2006, 4). Leo approves the ripping up of mangroves and the creation of an artificial beach, more interested in business success than maintaining the natural environment. Yet, only three years later "[Cyclone] Yusuf was teaching me a lesson" (McGahan 2006, 4). In this future dystopian tale, the environmentalists became another casualty in the totalitarian, conservative country that Australia has become. Yet nature still battles on, regardless of humanity's influence.

In this instance, *Underground*'s wild beach shares a likeness to the beach in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957). Another dystopian narrative, *On the Beach* features a world that has slowly poisoned itself in the aftermath of a nuclear war. Yet the beach

continues to roll on, regardless of the lack of humanity around it. Moira's final moments on the beach, looking upon the waves, are similar to Leo's in *Underground*. However, Moira's fatalism is far more pronounced: she has just taken the tablet that will end her life, already she is suffering from radiation sickness. There is no escape for her. Comparatively, Leo believes his best option is to let himself drown after his investment goes so horribly wrong that he cannot see a way out. Either way, the beach is uncaring and washes away any effect of humanity upon its shores. These texts tend to prioritise or highlight the importance of the natural: humanity is punished for its desecration of the natural world. *On the Beach* is less didactic than *Underground*: the blame is levelled at governments that engaged in acts of warfare and as a result the ordinary people suffer. Ultimately, however, the end result is the same in that the beach carries on with or without its population.

JoJo Moyes' *Silver Bay* (2007) is a text that clearly illustrates the dichotomy between the urban and the natural in a contemporary setting, heavily privileging the beautiful aesthetic of the natural beach. Silver Bay is a small town community on the coast of Australia with a thriving whale watching business. The narrative centres on Mike, a British man working for a development company that is interested in building a resort and water park in the area. The locals are concerned this will interfere with the whales – not only destroying the local business but also damaging the local ecosystem. Mike is sent out to scope out the area and send reports back to his boss in London. Mike initially sees that the town is ripe for development: "The waters are clear and protected, perfectly suited to watersports and, in the warmer months, swimming. There is little in the way of a tidal system, making it safe for bathing, and there is a thriving but low-level cottage industry in cetacean-watching" (Moyes 2007, 73). Immediately, Liza and her colleagues' whale watching business is written off by Mike as 'low-level' or inconsequential. However, this all changes as Mike falls in love with Liza, a single mother of Silver Bay, and regrets his input in attempting to urbanise the space:

> I read the phrases I had proposed and felt sick. The gleaming, twelve-foot-high hoardings looked out of place on the near-deserted stretch of beach, and highlighted the shabbiness of the Silver Bay Hotel, whose peeling paint and stripped weatherboard now appeared a badge of pride (2007, 282).

He then works to try and stop the development, leaving his position with the company and instead battling against them. Although the novel is primarily a romance story between Mike and Liza, the environmentalist tones are clearly flagged throughout.

The beach itself in *Silver Bay* is very much maintained as a natural oasis that should not and cannot be threatened. The reclaiming of the beach and the ocean as a natural space is neatly juxtaposed with the forming of a new familial unit between Mike, Liza, and her two daughters. The implicit meaning suggests that, like the steady homogenous family unit they become, maintaining a natural beachscape is the ideal solution of this narrative. A normal beach, at least for Moyes in this text, is one unpolluted with urbanised development. *Silver Bay* is a text that does fulfil all three of Buell's triad of interpretations (Buell 1999, 707): the beach is a symbolic structure for Mike – representing the possibility of a new life where he is in control; a social construction – especially apparent in the developmental plans; and as an ecology – the natural beach being a privileged one. It is a text that certainly celebrates the beach as a natural haven that ideally will be left untouched. However, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Moyes continues to reinforce the binaries of natural and urban without allowing for any conglomeration. Mike completely transforms his approach from wanting the development to doing everything in his power to stop it. *Silver Bay* suggests the beach can only be one or the other, urban or natural, and Moyes is clear in her preference of the natural. Yet some questions remain unanswered: for example, Kathleen runs a small hotel in the area that is floundering with the lack of tourists and income. Once the development plans are stopped this eliminates the possibilities for competition, but it does not bring in new business. This is not addressed in the narrative and confirms the return to a binary opposition of natural and urban.

Similarly, a film such as *The Long Weekend* in its original and remade form (dir. Colin Eggleston 1978; dir. Jamie Blanks 2005) also maintains that the natural beach space should be privileged. As discussed in Chapter Three, the film follows a couple's weekend holiday on an isolated, purely undeveloped beach. Their intrusion signals the beginning of a battle of sorts – the animals and even plants of the landscape attack them after they show a lack of care for the natural environment. As a horror film, the text uses techniques of the genre to portray the same message as *Silver Bay*: that the beach is best

if left untouched. Yet, *Silver Bay* and *The Long Weekend* both rely on the introduction of the urban to fuel the narrative plot as the main point of contention: without the contrast of the urban, it is impossible to appreciate the beauty of the natural. In a sense, it is the introduction of structure that ultimately shatters the natural vista. Both texts end on a re-established equilibrium – one that again privileges the natural. In the case of *The Long Weekend*, the point is made very clear when humanity is completely eradicated from the space.

Urbanising the beach space and introducing structural elements can have a noticeably negative impact environmentally and economically and textual representations have captured this. However, in the textual representations of the beach, the beaches that lean more towards the urban can provide significant differences in how users interact with the space. Although the beach space remains a place of relaxation, it can also become a scene of excitement and competition that otherwise is absent from the more specifically natural beach examples. Generically, Australian beaches are more likely to be some form of combination of both natural and urban features. It is when a beach encompasses both these elements that a new significance is realised about the beach space: it is neither natural, nor urban, but rather a place that encourages all types of interactions within its sphere of existence.

Natural hazards and the role of technology

Another point of structure on the beach is generated through the increased use of technology. Many beaches in Australia then are urbanised in some form, such as, security towers, toilets, shops, and surfing clubs. However, this definitely does not apply to all beaches. Andrew Short has published extensively on the coastal geographies and ecologies in Australia, surveying every Australian beach (over 12 000 individual sites). His research examines the differing types of beaches (wave-driven, tidal, and so on) and he has published a guide to each state (for example, *Beaches of the Queensland Coast, Cooktown to Coolangatta: a guide to their nature, characteristics, surf and safety*, 2000). In a radio interview in 2004, just after completing the survey, he said: "[T]here's only a quarter of our beaches that you can drive a family car to, 75 per cent you can't drive a car to, 50 per cent you can't even drive any vehicle to. So what this means is the vast

majority of our beaches are in a fairly pristine state" (ABC Radio [online transcript], 2004). These untouched beaches retain a pure, natural environment, many without car parks or amenities to urbanise them. Regardless, they remain part of Australia's beach identity as a whole. However, the question of accessibility means that most people have a tendency to visit the same beaches year after year. And the beach they visit is decided as much on accessibility as anything else. Short's research was sponsored by the Surf Lifesaving Association of Australia and was used in the creation of their recently released iPhone application, BeachSafe (2011).

The application lists information and photographs about a beach's amenities, surf and swimming conditions, known hazards, and UV ratings (Figure 8). It also gives a hazard rating between 1 – 10 (based only on physical beach and safety conditions, not marine life or other biological hazards) – these were directly rated by Short and take into account only physical dangers. This information is important not only for Australians; as Huntsman (2001, 213) says, "Today, the frequent drowning of newcomers and tourists in the surf reminds us of how dangerous the Australian beach can be for those unfamiliar with it". Unfortunately, people routinely drown in the ocean (according to the Royal Life Saving Society Drowning Report from 2010, children are more likely to drown in bathtubs than the ocean; yet the risk, particularly for children under 9 and adults over 55, is still apparent) especially those outside of the patrolled areas. The 15 – 34 year old age bracket appears at higher risk of drowning in the ocean, and although clear data was unavailable, a link between alcohol consumption and drowning seems likely (Royal Life Saving Society 2010).

Figure 8: Screen shots of the iPhone application Beachsafe
This figure is showing information for Bondi Beach, New South Wales on June 6, 2011.

Therefore, information about the dangers is essential and technology such as the BeachSafe application is providing immediate access for beachgoers. The mobile application provides more detailed information than what most beaches carry (see Figure 9 – Kings Beach sign on page 130), which is primarily limited to the message "swim between the flags". Although each patrolled beach has a daily warning notice, is it often ignored by beachgoers. Technology becomes another way for people to access this crucial information.

The BeachSafe application is easy to use and appears to be breaking down the barrier of isolation around certain beaches. Bondi Beach, at the time of searching (June 7, 2011), was experiencing: 15°C temperature, 3°C water temperature, and a UV index of 2. Bondi Beach is one of Australia's most popular beaches, and as such has a high number of surf rescues required every year. The potential hazards listed are sharks, bluebottles, rips, and strong currents. The General Hazard Rating is a 7 – 'moderately dangerous' (primarily because of the 'Backpacker Express' rip). Interestingly, the application only focuses on the 'natural hazards'; no mention is made of the urban fears of petty theft or indecent exposure, for instance. This application allows the user to employ technology in an attempt to overcome the natural dangers that emerge in the beach space; however, urban dangers remain an issue.

Users are able to search the BeachSafe application for beaches based on proximity to their own location, or by postcode/place searches. The implications of this application are yet to be seen, as it was released recently in 2011. However, one possibility is that the concept of natural beaches known only to locals may diminish as technology encourages the sharing of information that is easily accessible to the general population. Technology is a significant result and cause of the urbanising of the beach. There is now the possibility of observing major beach locations online. The Coastalwatch website provides 'surfcams' as a way of providing current information about surf conditions, beach conditions, and weather. The website allows users to tap into the camera feed and view the livestream of the beach at any time. The cameras are also used in coastal maintenance and erosion patrol (Milestone Systems 2011). Similarly, the use of innovations like coastguard helicopters aid in beach surveillance; they watch for troubled swimmers and also possible shark sightings at popular beaches (Southern

Region SLSA Helicopter Rescue Service 2011). Technology can certainly assist in beach safety; yet it also can create more problems ecologically. For instance, early examples of technology included machinery for whaling and the development of shark nets. Both these initiatives had significant impacts on the environmental ecosystem of marine life. Shark nets, although providing a safer beach experience for humans, are not the only nets in the ocean. Moyes' novel *Silver Bay* (2007) has a scene describing a young dolphin caught in a 'ghost net' – lengths of fishing net classified as illegal in Australia, with disastrous results: "I saw, in that instant, a baby turtle, a huge gull – an albatross, perhaps – its feathers half torn away, an worse, near the surface, a dolphin, its eye open, its body tight in the netting" (2007, 249). Although Mike successfully saves the dolphin, the nets trap boats and animals alike, becoming as much of a threat as advancement at the time in fishing technology.

Sharks are a particularly threatening aspect of the Australian beach and one that has been frequently managed with technology, including nets, cameras, and tracking devices. The Australian landscape, especially the beach landscape, is a place of fear as much as holiday. As Bill Bryson humorously states in his travel narrative *Down Under*:

> It [Australia] has more things that will kill you than anywhere else. Of the world's ten most poisonous snakes, all are Australian. Five of its creatures – the funnel-web spider, box jellyfish, blue-ringed octopus, paralysis tick and stonefish – are the most lethal of their type in the world [...] If you are not stung or pronged to death in some unexpected manner, you may be fatally chomped by sharks or crocodiles, or carried helplessly out to sea by irresistible currents, or left to stagger to an unhappy death in the baking outback. It's a tough place (2000, 20).

The BeachSafe application, as mentioned earlier, categorises natural hazards. These are an inevitable part of the Australian environment. This fear of the natural hazards creates an obstacle to environmentalism in Australia; the country needs protection, while simultaneously the population need protection from it and the creatures within it. The country's history also shows this confusion, as initial colonial responses to Australia shifted between despair and delight. John Rickard (1996) discusses the 'cultural myth' that suggests Europeans found Australia a difficult and alien landscape, especially when their traditional uses of agriculture struggled. Yet there was still room for enjoyment: "It should not be surprising that colonists, used to the long, cold winters of northern Europe, found virtues in the temperate climate of the Australian seaboard" (Rickard 1996, 42).

However, the landscape and weather are not the only hazards of the Australian continent, and the dangerous creatures are often overlooked. An exception to this are horror texts, such as Gary Mclean's *Rogue* (1998) or *Blackwater* (dir. David Nerlich and Andrew Traucki 2008), which both feature an enormous and bloodthirsty crocodile in the Northern Territory. Luckily, the increase of technology allows for a more controlled, and therefore safer, beach environment: shark alarms and constant water surveillance help alert the population to such threats. Helen Tiffin discusses the threat, or as she suggests, the *imagined* threat, of sharks: "[...] sharks generate greater fear in humans (even those of non-maritime cultures) than virtually any other animal species, and are often referred to as *the* primary fear" (Tiffin 2009, 76, original emphasis). The "shadow" that the shark brings to a beach is significant, and one that authors and filmmakers capitalise on to expose fear and horror in their stories. A recent documentary, *Shark Harbour* (Tobin 2007), told of recent research into the bull shark population in Sydney Harbour during the summer of 2011 – 2012. Bull sharks are a particularly dangerous type of shark because of their ability to live in both fresh and salt water. Interestingly, the data collected by the research team showed that significant amounts of sharks are in the harbour annually throughout the summer and interact mostly peacefully with humans. However, the media attention surrounding a shark bite is frenzied: the documentary shows the outburst of horror after a man reported being bitten by a shark on a popular beach. The bite, eventually found to be from a fairly harmless Wobbegong shark, was initially reported as a bite from a Great White shark (a much larger and more dangerous species). The immediate response to an attack of any kind is panic, fear, and confusion. However, *Shark Harbour* does show that shark attacks can be exceptionally severe, and the unfortunate continuance of attacks suggests humans will continue to feel afraid of them in the water despite Tiffin's belief of the undeserved reputation they receive.

Leone Huntsman's *Sand in Our Souls* (2001) examines representations of sharks in fiction, particularly in Winton and Drewe's work. She suggests that the shark can symbolise the sinister in what is an otherwise ordinary setting (2001, 148). Both Winton and Drewe use the imagery of the shark to illuminate fear or personal revelations in their characters. For example, in *Dirt Music* (2001), Luther Fox's casual interactions with the sharks when he flees White Point and establishes himself on an

isolated area off the coastline, the way he appears to lack any interest in self-preservation clearly illuminates his deteriorating state of mind. Marion Halligan's short story 'On Mereweather Beach' (1999) also grasps some of the horror that a shark can bring: Ray and Step are two young boys who swim together at the local surfing club. Step is killed while racing:

> Behind the place where Step had disappeared a wave began its lift towards the shore and the watchers saw it rise in a trembling green crest and at that moment, that angle, the sun shone through it and silhouetted the body of Step in the mouth of a shark (1999, 150).

Step loses his leg before he is brought into shore, and never recovers from the loss of blood. The horror of the image stays with Ray, forming a "crystal" in his memory. And he appears to never snap out of his grief; he refuses to swim with the lifesaver club again, yet cannot avoid the ocean: "But Ray wouldn't go back, though he kept on swimming, far out to sea until his lungs squeezed and his muscles ached" (1999, 153).

Silver Bay (2007) also capitalises on the fear that sharks bring. Moyes' novel, as mentioned, is primarily an environmentalist story – ultimately, the small town's natural beachscape wins out over the urbanised development. Yet, the development is not halted; instead it is just relocated to a site near Bundaberg. And, when Liza blames Mike for sparking interest in Silver Bay, he responds: "You really think this area would have been untouched for ever?" (*sic* 228). It is Hannah's efforts that overcome the financiers; she sends out emails describing an increase in shark appearances in the area. The threat of sharks in the water is apparently enough to scare off the many visitors. It is the sharks (or threat of) that save Silver Bay after the locals catch a tiger shark and (falsely) indicate it might be an indicator of more sharks to come. Therefore, the sharks' presence is enough to generate enough discomfort to halt the development. Australia's natural feared elements, sharks, work in conjunction with the environmentalists' plans to maintain Silver Bay as a natural haven. This is not the only occurrence of sharks in the novel and it is interesting that even the term itself becomes associated with the dangers represented by the animal. Kathleen is a local celebrity for catching a shark as a young girl. The blurb suggests that Mike too has "shark-like tendencies" when he initially comes to Silver Bay. Yet each incident is revealed as false: Kathleen herself did not catch the shark; Mike's shark-like developer traits are overcome by love for the town and its people; and there were no real sharks spotted in the waters around Silver

Bay. Moyes plays on the fear, or Tiffin's "shadow", of the shark to further the narrative, but discloses that the sharks are not always what they appear to be. And yet, Kathleen labels the estranged husband that lied about Letty's death a "shark" – the term retaining its menacing connotations out of context.

Whereas S*ilver Bay* has a complex association with sharks, both in terms of the connotations and the word itself, Andrew Traucki's *The Reef* (2010) is a more traditional story. The film follows a group of friends who go out sailing. When their boat has problems and is overturned, they are faced with the choice of swimming through potentially shark-infested water, or waiting on the boat to be spotted in an infrequent flight path area. One stays behind, four choose to swim. The film allows the tension of the situation to drive much of the narrative as the characters are stalked by a large shark that attacks and kills them one by one until only one character survives. The film follows predictable patterns of the horror genre, and like the classic shark film *Jaws* (dir. Steven Spielberg 1975), relies on minimal viewings of the shark itself. This film uses Tiffin's (2009) "shadow" of the shark to effectively generate terror at the possibility and uncertainty of the shark's presence. Another Australian film that appears to be shifting the traditional representation of the shark is the recently released *Bait* (dir. Kimble Rendell 2012), in which a freak tsunami traps shoppers inside a supermarket with an enormous shark.

Shark research, as exemplified in *Shark Harbour* (2011), is being significantly helped by the increases in technology. The ability to attach satellite tracking sensors to sharks allows for researchers to understand shark behaviour in greater clarity than ever before. Beach safety is transforming with the changing technological opportunities being presented in Australia. However, as a result, beaches that could once be considered more natural locations are now being considered urbanised because of their technological status. The level of surveillance at many beaches is higher than suburban streets. With this increased surveillance comes an increase of safety, but at a price of privacy. And the introduction of a more continued human presence within nature has its own ramifications.

Sport on the beach

John Rickard (1996, 192) suggests that the beach "was the new frontier of urban Australia", particularly highlighting the pleasurable aspects of the landscape. Rickard believes that the beach became a place of sport and physical expression (particularly after World War I), which suited the Australian psyche. There is an inherent physicality of the beach space as a whole that is introduced because of the strenuous activity of swimming or surfing within the ocean. However, this is often contrasted with the minimal movement of sunbakers. The physical body, perhaps, is what links all users of the beach space – there is an awareness of the body, brought about by the nature of swimwear.

The beach environment lends itself to social sport encounters – the flat, open space and the fact most beachgoers are on holidays. As Figure 10 (Beach Volleyball at Mooloolaba, on page 131) shows, the beach encourages sporting behaviour. Social sport generally is informal and requires minimal equipment – a structure that can be put up and taken down quickly, such as the beach volleyball net in Figure 10. Yet sport on the beach also happens at a competitive level. Organised sporting activities have long played a role in the Australian national identity, and there is evidence of links with the beach: Rickard mentions the early horse racing events in Fremantle being held on the beach (1996, 96). The urbanised concept of sport, competition, and athleticism are frequently experienced on the beach – triathlons, ironman competitions, surfing competitions, and so on. Rickard likens the beach to "a grandstand from which the occupants viewed in the foreground the narrow margin of human pleasure, and beyond" (1996, 192).

Spectator sport particularly was of interest in Australia – perhaps because of the "dispersed character of Australian cities, with their generous provision of parks and grounds [...] this subtle fusion of the pursuits of pleasure and excellence became a significant expression of the colonial culture" (Rickard 1996, 99). This concept of the spectator has emerged beyond the city and onto the beach, with crowds gathering for beach marathons, triathlons, and surfing events across the country. *The Coolangatta Gold* (dir. Igor Auzins, 1984) sets up a grandstand on the beach for the climactic triathlon, but also allows the audience the opportunity to watch the physical expression

of the two training brothers. The Gold Coast is known for its iconic coastline that borders the sand and this is expressed clearly in the film.

Other textual examples of the grandstanding of the beach can be seen in Sonny Abberton's *Bra Boys* (2007), which includes documentary footage from surfer Koby Abberton's events with grandstands set up on the beach. *Newcastle* (dir. Dan Castle 2009) briefly showcases a similar set up in the surfing competitions that the boys compete in. The grandstand is an iconic image on some Australian beaches. It is an integral part of competitions – surfing, triathlons, ironman competitions, and so on. It generates an observed environment on the beach, much like the way technology is increasing surveillance opportunities. The grandstand is an unavoidable symbol of urbanisation on the beach – it is an infrastructure clearly man-made. Although frequently temporary, the grandstand shifts the identity of the beach from natural to urban and emphasises the competition underway.

Another example of this grandstanding concept was the partitioning of a section of Bondi Beach to host the beach volleyball competition during the Sydney 2000 Olympics. This created a very urbanised beach space, yet this was not widely welcomed by the local communities. The decision generated concern about the impact such a structure would have on the beach itself. Owen's (2002) exploration of the entrepreneurial impacts of the Sydney Olympics suggests that the Waverly Council in conjunction with the community successfully negotiated funding and a lasting legacy for Bondi, because of its position as such an iconic part of Australia's, and Sydney's, identity. However, there were clear negative effects on local business and the community. Urbanisation then of the beach space is not always encouraged, although it could be suggested that it is an inevitable outcome.

The next section of this chapter is now going to explore two case studies of urban beaches in textual representations and examine how the urban and natural are explored.

A case in point: Surfers Paradise

The Gold Coast is a significant population centre of Australia: according to the Gold Coast City Council, the population is 515 517 people. It has a high level of transient tourist traffic that visits the city for holidays. An important element of these beach holidays is the apartment – the more prestigious positions are those with an ocean view. Grahame Griffin (2003) examines the role of the ocean view and he suggests there is something soothing in the ocean or sea view. This is surely supported by the number of visitors (national and international) that visit the Gold Coast area annually (91% of visitors to the region are for holiday or recreation purposes, according the Gold Coast Planning Scheme 03). Griffin briefly historicises the role of the ocean view in Sydney, highlighting the initial relevance of the harbour view that was only challenged in the 1950s and 1960s by the newfound premium of the oceanic view (2003, 127). Although the view of the ocean is considered relaxing, it comes at the price of urbanising the surrounding beachfront area. Griffin (2003) explores the idea of the sea view at one of the ultimate urbanised beach zone, the Gold Coast. He suggests that "proximity to the sea – for the wealthier a sea view – heralds a return to a more 'natural;' environment and lifestyle, nature being represented by that last 'true' wilderness, the sea" (2003, 128). Ironically, Griffin is suggesting the use of the urban to appreciate the natural, again highlighting the interwoven relationship between the two. This is particularly obvious in Surfers Paradise, a region of the Gold Coast that has a high density of high-rise buildings. A popular tourist beach, it area attracts massive numbers of visitors and tourists annually and has a distinctive identity as an urbanised beach site.

However, the Gold Coast has often suffered from a poor reputation within Australia, with a history of heavy international tourism and high crime rates. Despite this, it is a place that plays a significant role in Australian beach imagery, perhaps because of the high percentage of people that visit it (Moorhouse suggests 80% of the national population have been to the Gold Coast). Moorhouse (2011) gives a long list of texts set on the Gold Coast, for example David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter* (1982) and *Harland's Half Acre* (1984) – although these examples are more Hinterland texts than beach texts. The Gold Coast is an interesting region that has rainforest areas within a short distance from the beach landscape. However, the texts chosen in this chapter show a distinctly

urbanised beach, both in the aftermath of the years of excess (such as in *Goodbye Paradise*) and more recently as a school leaving celebration (as in *Blurred*). What is also interesting to note are the differences between Surfers Paradise and Bondi Beach. Although often grouped together, their individual histories show the ultimate difference in their evolution. Moorhouse recognises that the Gold Coast was specifically designed as a "pleasure-dome", and he believes it "stands alone in a country which prides itself on its hedonism" (2011, 19). It was realised as a holiday location, as a place for people to retire to. Keith Moore in his article 'Embracing the Make-Believe: the making of Surfers Paradise' suggests that:

> Almost from its inception, Surfers Paradise attracted greater tourist numbers than nearby Gold Coast beaches despite the surf at many of these rival locations being safer. This largely occurred through the shrewd commercialisation of its highly marketable name (2005, 188).

The name itself and the connotations of pleasure that it inspired assisted in the creation of the "pleasure-dome" concept that Moorhouse refers to. Bondi Beach, in comparison, evolved more organically as an extension of the suburb of Sydney as the city expanded; although ultimately the end result may in fact now feel very similar. As has been discussed in Chapter Three, Bondi has a complex representation in terms of badland beaches, with an evil underbelly of crime seething below the surface.

Surfers Paradise beach itself is partially shaded in areas by the vast high-rise buildings built close to the water's edge and therefore sunbaking is restricted to sunny patches. But the high-rises are an integral "part of the fabric and fantasy of the Gold Coast. They are its supreme icons" (Griffin 2003, 125). The first high-rise was built in 1959: the Kinkabool – an eleven-storey building in Hanlan Street. This was the beginning of a building boom, leaving residents questioning "whether the construction of canal estates and tall skyscrapers were advancing or retarding their paradise" (Moore 2005, 198). Moore gives a condensed history of the region, and follows the progression from an unpopular area with inferior beach conditions in the early 1910s to a booming tourist destination. He explores the period through the Second World War and the increasing interest in Surfers Paradise during the 1940s and 1950s. Yet this appeared to be the end of its universal acceptance. Moore illustrates how many critics were less than pleased with the commercialisation and Americanisation of Surfers. Regardless, Surfers Paradise has remained a booming area of popularity despite the conflicting responses.

In fact, Moore states: "However, as the residents and numerous appreciative visitors to the surf-beach holiday city fully understand, from its very inception Surfers Paradise was not meant to be taken seriously" (2005, 205).

The Gold Coast Planning Scheme 03 (2010) states that over 50% of the Surfers Paradise dwellings are 3 storey or higher towers. Moore notes that at the time of heavy construction in the 1960s, people asked if the beach was becoming too suburban (Moore 2005, 198). However, this does not appear to have decreased the popularity of the beach, as it remains a busy and populous beach throughout the year. The Gold Coast Planning Scheme document details the desired plan for the Gold Coast regions. Specifically referring to Surfers Paradise, it states:

> Development adjacent to the beachfront should be designed to complement the existing built form of modern accommodation towers. The sudden transition from the beachfront to the high rise buildings is unique to Surfers Paradise and must be retained, but increased emphasis on public and private open space is encouraged (2010, 4).

Surfers Paradise's urbanised beachfront was initially designed and continues to be actively encouraged by the government's planning development guidelines. Other areas, such as the Peninsula, are limited to low-rise buildings and are considered a more residential area. However, Surfers Paradise is unashamedly urban and the region plans to continue that theme. The Gold Coast is often considered 'touristy' and unappealing by many locals of Queensland (Griffin states that only 9% of permanent residents live in the high-rises, for example). Moore states:

> Critics usually disdain the clutter of advertising signboards, the coloured neon lights, the glass and concrete towers, the Hawaiian and Riviera titles to restaurants, apartments and streets, the gaudy architecture of shopping malls and the bright clothing including Hawaiian shirts that locals and visitors often wear (2005, 199).

Yet it is impossible to ignore the iconography of the Surfers Paradise beach and its inherent urbanisation. The Gold Coast is a clear money-spinner for the state and one that is supported by the tourism industry. Visitors to the region are both domestic and international, suggesting that the urban/culture combination is an inviting one. The film *Coolangatta Gold* (dir. Igor Auzins 1984) attempted to capitalise on this commercialisation, and features sweeping panoramic shots of the urban high-rises and the beach. The beach, in this instance Coolangatta, is an ideal setting for the Coolangatta

Gold triathlon that forms the major narrative complication for the text. *Coolangatta Gold* tells of the fraught relationship between sons Adam and Steve, and their father who trains them. Adam is considered a strong contender to win the title at the annual running/swimming/surf skiing event and his father, Joe, is a ruthless trainer - apparently inspired by his own disappointment at winning second place as a young man. Joe, however, is dismissive of Steve, the younger brother, who then begins a strict training routine in order to prove his own worth. The Gold Coast is showcased in the youth orientated film. The film is immersed in domestic suburban issues rather than concepts of retreat and relaxation. Stephen Crofts (1990) discusses the blatant product placement and clear touristic showcasing of the Gold Coast in *Coolangatta Gold*, suggesting that both the genre and plot indicate a sanitised, friendly image of Australia with its "generic foci on sunny beach settings, on wholesome youth dancing and loving, and on the exclusively *psychological* darkness of the oedipal drama" (1990, 117, original emphasis). The Gold Coast is beautifully portrayed with sweeping shots of beachscapes and buildings.

The grandstand, mentioned earlier, that is built onto the beach is another facet in the way the beach in this film acts primarily as a stage for the ultimate showdown between Adam, Steve, and their father watching from the sidelines. During the many earlier training scenes, the beach becomes a track for the three men to run along, becoming a crucial element of their regime. Finally, the ongoing competition ends during the climax of the triathlon event with Steve hitting the final stretch in the lead. He satisfies himself that he has the ability to beat Adam, and then chooses to stumble so Adam can overtake him and claim victory. Despite its many flaws, succinctly explored by Crofts (1990), the film captures an essence of beach life as an extension of the suburbs. The beach is a space of training and competition, as is the banana plantation where the family lives. It plays host to confrontations between Steve and his father, encouraging Steve to decide to compete alongside Adam and hopefully beat him to the title. The Gold Coast setting specifically is not overtly significant in this film, despite the title of the film (rather, its importance is derived from the triathlon event that takes place there); however, the difference if the story were set on an isolated beach would be extreme. It is a clearly urbanised beach with many scenes of the men running along the sand punctuated by high-rise buildings in the background. At no point does the beach feel isolated or

relaxing; rather it is consistently populated with walkers or swimmers – even in the final scene, when Steve meets Kerri on the dunes, people are still visible in the background on the water's edge.

During the race itself, the commentator's voice over suggests there are 20 000 – 30 000 people watching the race. The competition storyline *relies* on the populated beach and the influx of international visitors during the race period. The grandstand that forms on the beach is filled with people and the soundtrack particularly makes use of this, once again highlighting the inherent urbanism in the Gold Coast beachscape. During the race, the soundtrack consists of an electronic 1980s stylised song that at times is punctuated by isolated heavy breathing of the brothers and the cheering of the crowd. In the climax of the race, director Auzins changes to slow motion, muting the sounds of everything but the sounds of breathing and the squelching sand beneath the runners' feet. The melodramatic use of sound design highlights the inescapable beach setting – the sound of the sand is impossible to ignore. The beach is necessarily urbanised in this film, becoming an extension of the domestic drama broiling within the family, and the all-important setting for the title competition – the Coolangatta Gold triathlon. The beach is beautiful and scenic, but is also busy, populated, and structured by urbanisation.

Whereas *Coolangatta Gold* idolises both the beach and the human (particularly male) body, and carefully showcases an urban and well populated beach, *Goodbye Paradise* (dir. Carl Schultz 1981) presents an aging protagonist and far fewer day time shots of the beach itself. The second textual example of the Gold Coast, *Goodbye Paradise*, is a complex story of political corruption in the region. Michael Stacy, former Assistant Police Commissioner (before he became an alcoholic) is paid to privately track down the daughter of Les McCreadie, a local conservative Senator. Stacy then becomes embroiled in uncovering an army coup, and the leaders' right-wing scheme to separate the Gold Coast and surrounds as an independent state of Australia in order to maintain ownership of the immense oil reserves in the area. The conspirators are Stacy's two friends from their days in the army, Quiney and Todd, making the betrayal a personal one.

The film, as noted by Geoffrey Mayer (1993) is a film noir in the style of the American author Raymond Chandler. Stacy is a typical, flawed protagonist – although the film is obviously an Australian one: "Situations, characterisations and setting are reinterpreted through reference to distinctive Australian imagery" (1993, 114). And this is clear in such dialogue as describing a woman as "meaner than a beach full of blue bottles" (Schultz 1981). As such, Surfers Paradise in this film is an Australian version of the seedy American towns Chandler's detective Philip Marlowe would visit; an awkwardly glitzy city of neon lights filled with cheap souvenir shops and tacky Vegas-style entertainment shows. This image is one seen often in recent media after numerous crimes have been reported in the area. An early scene depicts Stacy on a drunken night out after finding his future publishing deal has been cancelled. Sober for three months prior, he quickly resumes his alcoholic behaviour through a number of sadly glittering pubs. Stacy is easily affectionate with many women and the bars are teeming with scantily dressed dancers, patrons, and prostitutes. A particularly poignant scene from one bar has a group of showgirls, led by a clearly disinterested drag queen, singing to a mostly aged crowd. It is a scene that captures the tone of the film, representing the city as tired and cheap looking since the glamour has worn off. Surfers Paradise is not quite the paradise the name suggests; rather *Goodbye Paradise* gives the impression it is a place of lonely people struggling for a connection. Stacy's noir-style voice-over calls the city: "the strange bright place Australians went to instead of dying" (Schultz, 1981).

The beach in *Goodbye Paradise* is still in some ways the 'Paradise' of the title. It is a natural beauty that, although encroached upon by the ever-increasing high rises, retains its idyllic appeal. Stacy yearns for the simplicity of walking his dog on the beach at dawn, which he finally realises in the film's epilogue. The beach is a symbol of purity, especially for Senator Les McCreadie. McCreadie is killed, according to his daughter, because "he didn't want the beaches getting dirty". McCreadie's beliefs, and Bill Todd's rather underdeveloped 'Garden of Eden', forms part of a rather subsumed and uncertain theme of environmentalism in the film. The 'Garden of Eden' is a commune of people hoping to find an alternative to crude oil using local supplies of rhubarb. The inhabitants live without artificial light and attempt to decrease their impact on the earth. However, Todd is revealed as part of the take-over scheme, suggesting his motivations for the commune are not as pure as they first appeared. The beach is a

natural counterpoint to the urbanised corruption that surrounds Stacy. This is particularly noticeable in the reunion scene of Stacy, Quiney, and Todd for the final time. Taking place at dawn, a giant chess set occupies much of the beach. Quiney wins the game and then tries to convince Stacy to join their coup. Stacy refuses only to discover the meeting was sham – while away, a bomb is placed in his car (incidentally killing Kate, Stacey's romantic interest of the film). While this scene on the beach establishes the major climax of the film – the betrayal of Stacy's friends – it is then bookended by the epilogue. The film ends with Stacy walking his dog on the beach with an ironic, slightly nostalgic voice-over:

> I thought about homes and families and Kate, and everything I'd loved and lost and tasted once and been afraid of ever since I was a schoolboy here in this strange town. I wasn't sadder, or wiser, or perceptibly older, but I knew how old I was. And that was good too, in its own way (Schultz, 1981).

The realisation that the eponymous paradise was not the city, but in fact youth, allows Stacy to reflect that although he is perhaps not where he wanted to be, it is not too bad after all. The beach, never overwhelmed by the glitz stamped upon it, allows Stacy a noir-style moment of muted, tired satisfaction.

The Gold Coast emerges from these perceived realities as a cheap and tawdry landscape, primarily driven by exhibition of the body. The naivety of Steve in *Coolangatta Gold* is easily matched by Stacy's cynicism in *Goodbye Paradise*. What is clear is the consuming urbanism in these representations. The Gold Coast cannot emerge as wholly natural, despite the beautiful beach environment. Its reputation remains a gaudy, tourist-based one, despite the introduction of programs like Surfers Paradise Nights (Surfers Paradise Alliance 2012), which attempts to generate a message of safety for night time activities on the Gold Coast. The concept of spectatorship and the grandstand is significant in this setting and the technology available has just increased this element of surveillance. In 2011, the Gold Coast was named the host of the 2018 Commonwealth Games. It will be interesting to see what this does for the region and whether the Gold Coast's reputation will shift as a result.

A moment in time: Schoolies week (November, Surfers Paradise)

One example of significant tourist traffic at the Gold Coast, particularly Surfers Paradise, is 'Schoolies' – a week-long celebration for high school leavers that is famous for numbers of 30 000 or more teenagers arriving for a two week period (predominantly peopled by Queensland and New South Wales students). The event continually makes headlines because of violence; drunk and disorderly behaviour; sexual assault; and underage drinking. In 2010, for example, 145 school leavers were arrested at the Gold Coast during the first week of 'schoolies' (Dillaway 2010). The media representation of the event is generally poor, often listing arrest figures with accompanying images of police physically restraining young people – such as Dillaway's article in *The Gold Coast Bulletin* (2010). The Gold Coast, in particular Surfers Paradise, is ideal for 'schoolies' because of its large amount of accommodation available. It is a time when beach technology is very useful, from patrolling beaches filled with a larger than usual number of swimmers to tracking people missing on the beach.

The 2002 film *Blurred* (dir. Evan Clarry 2002) chronicles the 'schoolies' experience for an interconnected group of friends. Although Surfers Paradise features surprisingly briefly (the film is concerned more with the journey to the event) it is an instantly recognisable and urban beach. Perhaps a typical coming of age story, *Blurred* is very specific in its beach setting. Clearly marketed as the Gold Coast, the film is spliced with footage taken during one 'schoolies' week prior to filming. Drunken teenagers fighting, laughing, and walking along Caville Avenue (the main street) and the main beach juxtapose the stories of the characters in the film. Although involving underage drinking and swearing, the film remains a remarkably sanitised version of the event, without exploring the realities that emerge in news stories such as fatal accidents and sexual assaults. Rather, the film uses the beach as an ideal – a place of reward and rejuvenation. Each of the interlinking characters is striving to reach the beach. The two that do, Pete and Freda, run into each other simultaneously seeking a rebirth of themselves while fully clothed in the water. Freda, a girl from a wealthy family, is staying in her mother's apartment but is harassed by a group of rowdy boys in the apartment above. Pete has become an uncomfortable third wheel in his trio of friends

after the other two begin a relationship. As such, both are feeling let down by their friends and anxious about the start of the "rest of their lives".

Their shared experience in the ocean generates a comradeship and suggests that perhaps there is more to come. The beach can be viewed as a catalyst for their friendship because Pete and Freda wash into each other while amongst the waves. Their meeting is by chance and they are unaware of the circumstances that have linked their friends on their journeys to Surfers Paradise. The beach connects the two characters and provides the initial setting for their burgeoning friendship. Although a title card states that they ultimately find happiness with other people, the moment suggests that they have reached some kind of new understanding of this transitional period between high school and the rest of their lives. Ultimately, *Blurred* uses the beach as a tantalising drawcard to the characters, and this is emphasised in Clarry's use of panoramic sweeping shots of the beach and the urbanised buildings on the shore line as well as underwater shots following Pete's run into the ocean.

This selection of texts primarily shows the Gold Coast as a dated and drab city. As Frank Moorhouse says, there is a new growing acceptance of the Gold Coast as a place beyond "violence, sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll" (2011, 19) and perhaps the next decade or so will expose that. The texts of the Gold Coast appear to struggle with the inherent urbanisation of the beach. Rather than becoming truly representations of a Thirdspace beach, both *Coolangatta Gold,* and *Goodbye Paradise* problematise the natural elements of the beach space. In *Coolangatta Gold*, the beach is established as mythically enticing, more of an advertisement for the Gold Coast than a legitimate exploration of the complexity of the beach. As such, the everyday or ordinary experiences of the characters hold little weight. In comparison, *Goodbye Paradise* shows the beach solely as an awkward fusion of urban and natural, with far more focus on the shady areas of urbanism. The gritty reality of Stacey's plight challenges any mythic representations of the beach, and in fact, the film feels to be intentionally showing the beach as just an extension of the city.

Case in point: Bondi Beach

The drab, daggy Gold Coast is not the only urban beach in Australia. Both Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) and Ann Game (1990) highlight Bondi Beach as another example of the natural and urban colliding on the beachspace. Peter Corris' novel *The Empty Beach* (1983) is an example of a text that explores Bondi Beach, particularly in regards to its urban elements. One in a series of novels featuring Cliff Hardy, a private investigator, it is set on Bondi Beach in the 1980s. It is another noir-style story and was adapted into a film version in 1985, although according to Mayer, without achieving the success of *Goodbye Paradise*: "Without the use of voice-over, Cliff Hardy comes across as an introverted observer intermittently delivering smart remarks and pseudo-tough threats" (1993, 117). Mayer's article is more concerned with how the film is a representative of film *noir*, and suggests that it is not a strong example – by changing elements of the source novel, it created an unappealing detective without that "special relationship between the detective and his world, the large, threatening, impersonal city" (1993, 117). It is this world that is of importance in the novel. The story's narrative is wrapped up in casino ownership in Sydney and is primarily set around the suburbs of Bondi Beach. Hardy is investigating the death of John Singer, supposedly drowned at Bondi (despite being a strong swimmer), at the request of his wife, Marina. Hardy is a familiar noir character: a tenacious but battered detective, worn down from time in the army and a life following criminals. The plot in this novel itself is complicated and in some ways remains a mystery. Hardy discovers his client hired him as a way to eliminate her competition in the casino market – John Singer, apparently alive, left her instructions. The novel ends on an obvious note of exhaustion. Marina Singer asks Hardy to track down John again – but alive, this time:

> The hand holding the cigarette was shaking, and she looked every one of her fifty-plus years. 'You won't believe this. I can hardly believe it myself. But I've been told that John is in Bangkok. He was seen. He's had plastic surgery. There's a girl … Shit!' (Corris 1983, 159).

Hardy refuses, the final words of the novel, assumedly smarting from being played as a pawn in the plan.

In the way of hard-boiled detective fiction, and like Michael Stacy of *Goodbye Paradise*, Hardy is a pessimistic and flawed man; divorced, lonely, trying to quit smoking and

drinking too heavily, celibate. Although not featured heavily in the text (the majority of the narrative happens in the suburbs surrounding Bondi), the beach retains a presence throughout. It is a form of an underbelly, a place of differing nationals all linked by a lack of space:

> I walked, reflecting that these Bondi people were a breed apart; they ate out and lived on top of each other. Next to food joints, secondhand furniture places seemed to be the most common businesses. Those flats needed furniture, and I wondered if it was cheaper tenth hand than third hand. I doubted it (Corris 1983, 23).

In stark comparison to the product placement and glamorous portrayal of Coolangatta in *Coolangatta Gold*, *The Empty Beach* instead embraces a more ordinary, mundane type of beach setting. Bondi, an obvious tourist attraction and famous location of Sydney, becomes just another setting for peculiar human behaviour – the crux of the narrative. In this, it again shares similarities with *Goodbye Paradise*.

It is interesting to note that film texts appear to be more popular in highlighting the differences between the natural and the urban. Aesthetically, the urbanism of the Gold Coast and Bondi Beach lend themselves to the visual medium. In comparison, novels are often more concerned with coastal community stories from residential areas, like *Night Surfing* (Capp 1996), *Dirt Music* (Winton 2001), and *Silver Bay* (Moyes 2007). Bondi especially is such an iconic image that it is not surprising it is more likely to be represented in film rather than written mediums.

Goodbye Paradise is set in winter at the Gold Coast and *The Empty Beach* is set on Bondi Beach in October. The detectives both feel out of place in their suits on the sand. The first chapter of *The Empty Beach* introduces the reader to Cliff Hardy while he is waiting for his appointment with his client. The initial paragraphs paint a vivid picture of the beach:

> I was early as always and I wandered down to the beach to kill the time. The suntanned people outnumbered the pallid, although it was only October. You can sunbathe all the year round in Sydney if you pick your spots and days and have nothing better to do.
>
> I stood on the steps of the pavilion looking out at the heavy surf and the few people braving it with their boards and bodies. They looked frail, as if the sea was playing with them rather than the other way around. Any minute, it seemed, the water could rise up and obliterate them. But the sun was shining and the

> sand glowed; some of the pale people were turning pink and it was no time for glum thoughts. I took two lungfuls of the ozone and still wanted a cigarette (1983, 9).

These early paragraphs not only introduce the bitter protagonist and his flaws, but also illuminate the juxtaposed image of Bondi. On the sand it is a place of hedonistic sun tanners; in the ocean, the people are more fragile – the water a little more unpredictable. The first person narration is cynical and immediately establishes that Hardy assumes that things are not always as they appear. This Bondi Beach is much more like the Surfers Paradise of *Goodbye Paradise*; the texts, linked by their noir roots, are much removed from the glittering, sun-soaked beach scenes of *Coolangatta Gold*. The 1980s in Australian cinema reflected an identifiable trope of defeatism and alienation (Mayer 1993, 115). All these texts encompass that – Steve lets Adam defeat him; Stacy is betrayed by his friends which results in Kate being killed; and Hardy is manipulated into doing what John Singer had planned for him. However, *Coolangatta Gold* lets this defeat be a turning point for Steve, and allows him to progress in life as a man no longer striving for his father's approval. In comparison, the noir style texts are less optimistic and end on a more subdued note.

The texts portray a type of conflicted beach space that is both urbanised and natural. The noir texts are, true to their genre, more concerned with the urban cities that edge onto the beach. Although some of the narrative ends up on the sands, the focus remains the city. There is no grandstand of spectators, but the detectives' skills lie in observation. *Goodbye Paradise* and *The Empty Beach* are both dark and ultimately depressing texts. Yet Bondi has a more favourable portrayal in other films: *Two Hands* (dir. Gregor Jordan 1999) shows a busy, popular, and beautiful beach. The reality television show *Bondi Rescue* (Baker 2006 - ongoing) takes much effort to highlight the inherent beauty of the iconic beach – particularly important because of its overseas syndication. However, what the texts examined here show is the conjunction of urban and natural and helps illustrate how Australians view their internationally sought after spaces.

Conclusion

The beach has been considered an urbanised space for some time now. As the urban sprawl has continued, some Australian beaches have become extensions of suburbs and Bondi Beach is an example of this in Sydney. This chapter has explored the clash of the urban and natural on the beach and the ensuing relationship of both. Whereas Chapters Two and Three discussed the mostly natural beachscapes, this chapter examines what happens when the urban world of the city expands and meets the beach. Rather than being a liminal space of edges – either to the city or the ocean – the Australian *beachspace* is natural and/or/both urban. The urban is representative of the everyday infiltrating the mythic beauty of the natural beach space, removing it from its iconic position and bringing it down to an ordinary level.

The urban beach appears to maintain a level of fear of the unpredictability of nature. Many representations of the urban beach include structuralisation that allows for some form of control over nature – such as shark nets, or strident patrolling methods. The role of technology is an interesting concept on the beach and can be seen as one way in which the urban and natural work together to create a harmonious beach space. Technology has limited the isolation of beaches and improved warnings for hazards, such as sharks. Services like the Westpac Lifesaver Helicopter Rescue Service have also significantly increased beach safety with its ability to patrol beaches and the ocean faster and with higher visibility than boats or lifeguard towers. Technology has also improved environmental control, particularly in the role of monitoring erosion. The inclusion of regular organised sporting events on the beach has increased the use of technology on the beach. However, technology does come with ramifications, such as the decrease in privacy on beaches and the inevitable infiltration of urbanism on the natural landscape.

This chapter has also explored two specific cases of exceptionally urbanised beaches, the Gold Coast region, particularly Surfers Paradise, and Bondi Beach. Surfers Paradise and Bondi Beach are both beaches that are incredibly popular tourist destinations and as such have constructed an urban landscape to support the high influx of people. Despite the mythically beautiful images portrayed in some texts and advertising

material, these beaches are not examples of a 'perfect mix' of urban and natural in fiction. As in the observed 'reality' of these two beaches, there is a tendency to lean too far towards the urban, hence the high level of tourism and, as Chapter Three showed, badland possibilities. The textual representations show nuances to the beaches, yet they do struggle to illustrate a lived *beachspace*. Despite this, Bondi Beach and Surfers Paradise have paved the way for urban development on beaches and, notwithstanding their more glamorous appearance, are two examples of beaches that shifted the focus from only natural beauty and instead privileged the role that humanity can bring to the beach space. Both beaches tend to fall too closely to the urban end of the divide, ultimately sacrificing their natural elements. As such, neither is successfully represented as a *beachspace,* yet the possibility does clearly exist for a beach that does encompass both. And in fact, as the Gold Coast shifts in response to new programs like Surfers Paradise Nights, and the upcoming Commonwealth Games, perhaps its identity will also change to become a more balanced and broadened type of Australian *beachspace*.

Figure 7: St Kilda, Melbourne

This beach in St Kilda, Melbourne, is a popular destination for visitors in the city as it is easily accessible by tram from the city centre. A trendy location, restaurants and bars are located along the road closest to the ocean. This photograph was taken during winter and therefore belies how busy this section of beach can become. It is an example of an urban beach, existing on the outskirts of one of Melbourne's inner suburbs.

Figure 9: Kings Beach sign

This is a sign found at Kings Beach, on the Sunshine Coast (Queensland). It is generic and representative of most signs near beaches in Australia. The primary information is to swim between the flags, and how to determine if the beach is closed (red flag as opposed to yellow).

Figure 10: Beach volleyball at Mooloolaba

This image shows a social game of beach volleyball on the main beach at Mooloolaba. Set up outside of the patrolled flag area, a combination of men and women are playing, with no official affiliation with sporting clubs. Games can become a part of the beach framework and can encourage spectators.

Chapter 5:

The Lived Experience: the local spaces of coastal communities

> *He hated the way they came down on weekends and told the locals how to behave. He hated their self-righteousness and all that bronzed Aussie shit (Capp 1993, 177).*

The Australian Beachspace, so far, has established some of the complexities of the Australian beach. Chapter Two discussed the beach as a beautiful space, one that provided healing and a connection to a transcendent spirituality. Chapter Three discussed the disruption of the mythic beach and how this allowed beaches to become badland spaces. Chapter Four examined the conglomeration of the urban and the natural in Australian beaches. This chapter explores the dichotomy of the coastal communities, primarily between the locals and the visitors or tourists. In order to establish this apparent inherent divide, *The Australian Beachspace* also examines the role of the beach holiday.

To begin, this chapter discusses how the stark differences between the local communities and temporary visitors (both day trippers and long term beachgoers) generate a discomfort. Textual representations suggest that local people interact with the beach differently than those who are only visitors. Some texts focus on the types of society found in coastal regions, such as in the film *High Tide* (dir. Gillian Armstrong 1987), which represents a long-term caravan park community. As such, it is important to cover all ways that people interact with the beach space for leisure. Many permanent residents still use the beach for leisure, such as the girls in *Puberty Blues* (dir. Bruce Beresford 1981) who are frequently at the beach after school; and the surfing boys in *Newcastle* (dir. Dan Castle 2008) who, along with their grandfather, are often at the local beach or the natural swimming pool. There is also a difference between the capital cities

and the oceanside towns outside of them. A text like *Bra Boys* (dir. Sunny Abberton 2007), set in Maroubra (an outer suburb of Sydney) is quite different to Fiona Capp's *Night Surfing* (1996), which is set in a quieter coastal town in New South Wales. These works have been chosen because they represent the smaller, more individual stories of people living at or visiting the beach. There is a distinction between the residents, long-term visitors, and tourists that is identified in this chapter. The multiple users of the beach fall into a type of hierarchy where the residents or locals are privileged over the others. This is most apparent in *Night Surfing*, in which one of the protagonists, Hannah, is still considered a city girl despite her lengthy stay at the coastal town that serves as the setting for the narrative.

The beach is home for many Australians along the coastline. The beach may feature regularly or rarely in their everyday life, but it is considered a part of the community's identity. The beach can play a role in the lived experience of the locals – locals interact with the beach in familiar ways, such as fishing, swimming, or walking along the beach. Some locals use the beach for relaxation after work; for others it is an integral part of the workday. The important element for the locals is that the beach is a fixed part of their day to day life. Whether its involvement is minimal, it remains a continued presence. This is starkly different to the tourists, who visit the beach throughout the year on holiday. For the tourists, the beach becomes a type of lived experience, but it is impossible to deny the fact that it is a temporary one. The tourist has an end date to their trip, and the beach is considered a brief respite from their daily lives. Therefore, for the tourist, the beach is far more likely to be closely linked to the *imagined* space: something that is desirable and distinctly mythic despite the short-term familiarity and ease that can build throughout a holiday experience.

This chapter firstly establishes the dichotomy of the local and the tourists on the beach and showcases the differences of experience that the two groups have. Secondly, the chapter explores the concepts of doing nothing, play, childhood, the role of supervision, and coming-of-age. The tourist experience on the beach is often linked to childhood and family. Beach holidays are often family activities. The beach's geography forms a type of natural playground that appeals to children. However, like all playgrounds, it requires mediation and supervision so that children can be safe from danger. The beach can be a

dangerous space, as has been outlined throughout *The Australian Beachspace*, and therefore children usually require some form of surveillance on the sands or in the water. Primarily for families, this becomes the role of the parents. In textual representations, this role is frequently filled by the mother – the figure who watches. And yet, as children age, mediation is not required so strongly: in fact, teenagers are more likely to be represented using the beach as a setting for a coming-of-age story (such as in *Blurred* [dir. Evan Clarry 2002]).

Thirdly, this chapter explores the role of memory, which has the power to unite the locals and tourists to generate a shared, lived beachspace. Childhood and teenage-years can be some of our most influential periods of life. It is not surprising then that memory can be such a powerful, if unreliable, tool. Memory clearly shapes authors' and filmmakers' vision of the Australian beach, in much the same way it influences many Australians. Some creators are open about this process, such as Winton, who readily discusses his childhood and the impact it has on his work. But he identifies that his childhood memories of the beach are unbalanced: "Have I idealised these summers and chased their myth all my adult life? Did the suburban boy simply imagine himself a coastal life?" (Winton 1993, 6). What Winton discovers is that the beach remains a much more obvious part of his memories, despite living primarily in the suburbs. Bruce Bennett (2006, 32) in his discussion of Winton's work in his chapter, 'Nostalgia for Community', says: "this is a reminder of the traditional distinction (in fiction as in life) between routine and intense experience. The duality of modes is necessary". The more "intense" experiences then are the ones that dominate our memories.

Memory is an imprecise tool, but one that plays a significant role in textual representations of the beach. The beach allows a freedom from societal norms that cannot be transgressed in other areas – this is obvious in terms of clothing (a much higher level of undress is acceptable on beaches and in surrounding cultural centres), but also in the carefree and playful behaviour that can be indulged in at the beach. The beach becomes a trigger that releases these memories, igniting once more when one returns to a beach later in life. It is memory that layers the mythic and the ordinary of the beach together into the beach space. Some textual examples that are discussed in

this section include *Why You Are Australian* (Gemmell 2009), *Land's Edge* (Winton 1993), and *Breath* (Winton 2008).

Memory can become mythic or imagined by the passage of time, generating a type of conceived ideal that tourists bring on their holiday. The tourists allow the imagined space to emerge within the reality of the everyday space that they are experiencing. In this way, the tourists are creating their own version of a *lived* experience. The Australian beach can provide lived experiences to both locals and tourists: it is a layered, complex *beachspace*. The beach shifts for its visitors, being an iconic image of holidays as promised by tourism advertising and/or/both the ordinary beachscape that people encounter on a daily basis: and most importantly, becoming a *lived* space for both. The Australian beach has the ability to transgress between and around these concepts and more, becoming a Thirdspace site, or *beachspace*, that is more than the sum of its parts.

The lived experience of the locals

As has been discussed previously, the majority of Australians live in the major cities around the coastline. However, a significant proportion also lives in the smaller coastal communities that litter the edges of the continent. Interestingly, this is a popular part of textual representations of the beach. Australian texts appear to be more interested in the dynamics of a residential beach society rather than a holiday one. Most of these more regional areas on the coastlines rely on local businesses, farming, or shipping industries alongside the influx of interest during the summer peak season. For example, Coffs Harbour (New South Wales) relies predominantly on banana farming and tourism, and Hervey Bay (Queensland) is known for its whale watching business (also reliant on tourist interests). There is an interest in texts in exposing the type of lifestyle enjoyed by people living in these areas. As such, texts emerge like *Puberty Blues* (Lette and Carey 1979), *High Tide*, *Newcastle*, *Dirt Music* (Winton 2001), *Breath* (Winton 2008), *Silver Bay* (Moyes 2007), and *Time's Long Ruin* (Orr 2010).

Australian stories are likely to feature narratives exploring the ordinary communities that live on coastal areas in comparison to tourists. Australian cinema has frequently found success in examining the local stories of individual communities, both humorous (such as *The Castle* [dir. Rob Sitch 1997]) and serious dramas (for example, the recent spate of urban stories, such as *Animal Kingdom* [dir. David Michôd 2010]). Class representations are often a focus within Australian cinema, with the 'Aussie battler' being a frequently, if now stereotypical, cited trope. A classic film such as *Sunday Too Far Away* (dir. Ken Hannam 2012) represents the struggles of the working class as the shearers are faced with pay cuts, yet carry on working regardless. As Jonathan Rayner (2000, 99) suggests, however, "the film's admiration for the shearers' resignation to their lot and preservation of principles is tempered by acknowledgement of their stubborn self-destructiveness". This stubbornness of the working class is something seen in Gillian Armstrong's coastal story, *High Tide* (1987). The film is set in Eden on the east coast and features teenager Ally, her guardian grandmother, and the re-emergence of Ally's birth mother, Lilly. Ally and her grandmother live in a caravan park on the coastline. Ally's grandmother, who works at the local fishing factory, is unable (or unwilling) to change her outlook in life and appears quite resistant to Ally changing her possible future as well. The sense of inevitability in the film is significant, although Lilly's appearance challenges this dramatically.

Felicity Collins (1999), in her text about Gillian Armstrong films, discusses the use of framing in *High Tide* and how Armstrong creates a sense of disconnection between the beautiful coastal vistas and the caravan park of the narrative: "In *High Tide*, stunning coastal landscapes are regularly reframed to reveal toilet blocks, broken fence lines […] positioned for maximum discord with their seaside locations" (Collins 1999, 50). The landscape helps reveals the ordinariness, even the mundanity, of their lives. Ally's grandmother is overly strict, but otherwise, Ally's life consists of teenage worries about her boyfriend and being allowed to go the local dance. Ally's mother returns by coincidence when her car breaks down and she has to find somewhere cheap to stay. The narrative arc of the film is simple: how will Lilly deal with her daughter after leaving her years ago, and will she make the same choice again? The beach plays a significant role in this film. First, it highlights how out of place Lilly is in the community when she walks along the beach fully clothed in her black clothes, getting her boots wet.

Ally and her boyfriend look on in an amused bewilderment, clearly unsure of who this woman is, but aware of her lack of belonging to the space. Increasingly it becomes clear that Ally uses the beach as a place to achieve solitude: after a confrontation with her mother, she is shown face down in the water. For Ally, the beach appears to be a setting that allows her to take some control of her life, and her desire to surf is an extension of that. *High Tide* is an interesting mix of perspectives – Lilly's, for whom the beach seems to represent just another in a long line of landscapes she has moved amongst; and Ally's, who enjoys the beach intensely and frequently, and uses it as an escape from her reality.

Another interesting point is the representation of workers within these coastal communities. Obviously, people living in these places still require income and many coastal towns rely on the tourists to generate business. However, many textual representations do not appear to focus on this. *High Tide* and *Newcastle*, for instance, are not exceptionally interested in the role labour plays. It can be presumed that perhaps working life is not of primary concern for many characters in these situations – work is a means to an end rather than of interest to the story. For instance, in *High Tide,* Ally's grandmother, as mentioned, works in a fishing warehouse yet the job serves only as a setting for their farewell when Ally leaves. Yet, there are some notable exceptions to this. *Night Surfing* (Capp 1996) explores the working life primarily through the character of Rueben, an owner of a local café. Plagued by marital troubles, Rueben is also faced with the end of his business when a nearby bar is established that serves alcohol, stays open later, and is more popular than his own. He attempts to compete by staying open all night but with no luck:

> The café is dimly lit and seems to be floating in the surrounding darkness as though set adrift at sea. Occasionally, people wander past and peer through the window like curious fish, then quickly turn away toward the blazing lights and laughter across the road (1993, 162).

The café eventually has to close and Rueben is faced with the end of his business and his marriage simultaneously. This example clearly illustrates how businesses in coastal communities are often reliant on tourists and day-trippers, the very people that are considered to be in competition with the locals, in order to generate income. In this story, the business is a significant part of the text and a motivator in Rueben's personal narrative.

Winton touches on industry as well in *Dirt Music* (2001) when Georgie, local wife of White Point's head fisherman Jim Buckridge, has an affair with Luther Fox, an outsider living beyond the community's edge. Georgie discovers Fox is a shamateur, illegally fishing off the coast, poaching from her husband's territory. She tries to dissuade him, pointing out that her husband is ruthless and competitive. When they are discovered, Fox returns to the shore to find his dog has been killed and his truck's motor has been destroyed:

> He vaults from the boat in his wetsuit and walks up to the dog which lies in a stain of itself on the chain's end. Fragments of hair and meat discolour the sand. There's blood underfoot but no flies yet. The truck windows are blown out and the iceboxes are ragged with holes. Fox fishes the keys from the sidestep and shoves them into the ignition through the ruined doorframe. He doesn't expect a spark; doesn't get it. He pops the hood, sees the V8's blasted entrails and knows it's useless (2001, 131).

Fox is chased out of town after being threatened, and Georgie's relationship with her husband disintegrates quickly. What is of significance in this instance is the immediate and violent response that Fox's behaviour encourages. Local business is not something to trifle with, and in White Point Jim Buckridge and his fishing business controls the local industry.

Another textual example that explores a local community is Dan Castle's *Newcastle* (2008). Like many Australian beach films, it is considered a 'coming of age' story. Set in the coastal town of Newcastle (located quite close to Sydney), this text focuses much less on local business or income and instead follows a group of local teenagers and their quest for fun and surfing recognition. Jesse Hoff is an aspiring professional surfer, perpetually living in the shadow of Victor – his half brother and retired professional surfer after a knee injury. The film centres on a camping trip that Jesse and his mates take, including his gay brother Fergus, to an isolated stretch of beach that culminates in a nasty informal surf competition when Victor and friends show up. In the following 'battle', Victor is killed after being struck in the head by his own board. *Newcastle* places emphasis on the need to get out of the small town; Jesse's determination to win the pro championship appears to be just as motivated by that as by his desire to fill Victor's shoes. The beach in this film is the boys' salvation. Director Dan Castle lets the camera linger on the ocean itself, with multiple slow-motion sequences of surfing action. Jesse, who blames himself for Victor's death, struggles to re-enter the ocean afterwards. It is

only after an enlightening conversation with Fergus in which Jesse has a reflective moment on the beach at dawn that he chooses to surf once more. In this film, the beach is also part of Jesse's masturbatory fantasy: his focus appears split between Deb (a local girl) and surfing as demonstrated by the quick cuts used in this sequence. The ocean plays a significant role as a representation of Jesse's sexual desire. The beach is absolutely glamorised in this film; Castle has taken great effort to show it at its finest. It is distinctly linked to the location of Newcastle: Castle illustrates the port itself (briefly, and once again as a backdrop rather than a discussion of the industry) and the enormous ships out to sea. Of course, as a surfing film, the majority of the activity takes place beyond the beach and in the waves. The beach plays an integral part of Jesse's everyday life. These are the dynamics he struggles with on a regular basis and the beach is a salvation he can experience as often as he likes.

In *Newcastle,* the characters are young enough to still be making the childhood memories that will trigger their emotional response later in life. For these boys, play is an integral part of their story, although this is cut devastatingly short when tragedy strikes. There is an interesting dynamic when the group of friends are on their unsupervised trip away – a short drive to a nearby but isolated beach. Fergus's interest in Andy, Jesse's mate and surfing rival, is reciprocated; although Fergus admits he is gay, Andy's sexuality is assumed through his acceptance of Fergus – at no point does the film specify Andy's sexuality. The next morning, Fergus is invited out to surf for the first time with the others and Andy tries to teach him. Fergus is obviously set up in opposition to all of the surfers: the opposite of blonde, tanned, experienced. It takes a girl vomiting on Fergus' shirt for him to take it off at all, and in the water he is the only one wearing a surf shirt. Ultimately, however, he is accepted by Jesse and his friends – but not by Victor, his older brother. In comparison, the two girls who accompany them on the trip are offered no such acceptance. The gender disparities of this film are discussed in more depth in Chapter Six; however, the involvement of the girls in the story appears to be primarily as a physical desire for the boys. An awkward sex scene with two couples in the one tent is followed the next morning with the two girls sitting on the beach watching the boys surf. At one stage, Deb says, "I'm glad we're not out there" when Victor shows up and the surfing gets rough. They are relegated to the sand, with no possible escape and apparently no desire to. Unlike Debbie and Sue in *Puberty Blues*

(Lette and Carey 1979), who buy their own surfboard and enter the ocean on their own terms, Deb and Tracy in *Newcastle* have no interest in engaging with the men in the ocean. Instead, they remain on the beach, discussing the uncomfortable sexual encounters of the night before. Their lack of agency, perhaps despite the director's intention, is starkly contrasted with the slow but begrudging acceptance of Fergus in the film.

The Australian beach in *Newcastle* is certainly a familiar and mostly playful setting that highlights how the beach can act as a residential and constant landscape. The boys are rarely shown with any kind of mediation or parental supervision: they surf on their own, they take an unsupervised and obviously unapproved trip away, and the relationship Jesse, Fergus, and Victor have with their parents is clearly strained. The only environment that differs is the surfing competition, which is a very controlled exercise in beach activities. There is a large crowd gathered on the shore, with adjudicators and talent scouts also watching. Although it is different from parental supervision, it is the only event within the film that has some kind of mediation. It is here that Jesse is initially disqualified from entering the next stage of competition after he angrily cuts in on Andy's wave. Although he is offered the chance to redeem himself after Andy's spinal injury, the incident reveals the complexities of authority on the beach space for these local boys. The residential use of the beach is certainly different from the experience a temporary visit can provide.

Night Surfing, as mentioned earlier, is another residential story. Hannah, the main protagonist, is a university dropout who has decided to learn how to surf. Much of the book is focused on surfing – Jake, Hannah's love interest and surf mentor, is another major character who focuses on his dream to go surfing at night. Yet Capp still explores the nuances of a coastal community beyond a surfing environment. The novel has a sense of inertia to it; the days continue to unfold without any significant changes. The city in this novel acts as a foil to the coastal life and is set up in stark opposition. The city provides a world that Hannah needed to get away from, and it dragged Marie, a local who works with her husband Rueben in the café, away from her husband, luring her into a world of more opportunity for learning.

Eventually, Hannah's position as an interloper and not a local is too difficult to ignore, despite her lengthy stay in the community. There appears to be an inherent knowledge that cannot be gained no matter how long someone stays on the coast. Jake sees the difference in Hannah when she runs into a friend from university: "He watches Hannah, the change in her manner, the knowing, worldly tone of her voice" (1996, 170). Jake is the character most opposed to the city and it is because of the tourists that invade his town and his surf each year:

> In the past he'd made a policy of keeping his distance from anyone who came from the city. […] He saw the way they behaved on their holidays and the mess they left behind. They could always pick up and go back to their other lives. But for the locals there was nowhere else (1996, 177).

This concept is particularly poignant: for the locals, there is no other life and there is no reprieve from the mundane everyday. Throughout the novel Jake and Hannah's relationship ebbs and flows, and Jake is ultimately unable to traverse their inherent differences. Hannah's decision to learn survival skills from the surf lifesavers creates the opportunity for Jake to call it off. The rivalry between the surfers and surf lifesavers is intense and Hannah's status as an outsider is confirmed when she shows her lack of understanding of this tense relationship:

> Does she have no idea what she's done? It doesn't matter to Marcus but he knows how Jake will react. He will seize on it for sure. […] Marcus sips his beer and wonders what hope there can be for them, for her and Jake (1996, 154).

Their relationship ending appears to confirm Jake's and the other surfers' opinions of the city – it is a haven only for tourists and not a place for him. Despite her exclusion by Jake and his friends, Hannah continues to visit the beach daily, searching for some form of equilibrium. It appears to be her only salvation. Yet the ambiguity of the ending does not allow her that, leaving her caught between the two worlds.

The beach itself is represented in the novel as far more than just a continual feature of where they live; it is an uncontrolled landscape that threatens to overtake their lives on more than one occasion. Marcus dreams of tsunamis; Hannah's first surfing experience is terrifying when she cannot break the surface for air; Jake is led awry by the unseen tides during his night surf. The residential community within this story struggles with the monotony of life and the worry about being stuck, and the ending provides little hope: the situations are irrevocably changed and all they can do now is relearn and adapt. Rueben sells the café and loses his wife Marie to university in the city; Jake is

potentially lost in the ocean; Marcus' relationship with his son is fractured and uncomfortable; and Hannah is aware of how her choices ended her relationship. The narrative of Marie and Rueben particularly highlights the opposition between the perceived city life and the coastal life as Marie eventually leaves the town and her husband behind. Presumably the city accepts all comers whereas the beach community appears to remains insular and exclusive.

Another text that explores residential roles of the beach is JoJo Moyes' *Silver Bay* (2007). It takes an alternative approach to *Night Surfing* in that it uses first person perspective, but from multiple characters' point of view. Primarily, the three major narrators are Mike (a Londoner charged with staking out the area of a tourist resort development), Liza (a local woman who runs a whale watching company) and Kathleen (her grandmother, who also owns the Silver Bay Hotel). In conjunction, Liza's daughter Hannah occasionally narrates, giving a glimpse of her childlike approach to the story. Primarily the novel is a romance, although it has a significant emphasis on environmentalism and protecting endangered species, such as the humpback whales that Liza spends her life following. This text, unlike *Night Surfing*, portrays an almost idealistic residential community on the coast. Except for the ongoing threat of development, and the tensions with Liza's previous lover Greg, the community is loyal and connected in a way that is particularly surprising to Mike – the foreigner. He is the interloper in this story, but unlike Hannah in *Night Surfing*, he proves his worth by giving up his job, his fiancée, and choosing to fight the development rather than work for it. As such, his goal of being with Liza is fulfilled and he is accepted into the community. He is a character able to shift between the divide of locals and tourists, although not without making significant sacrifices in order to do so.

Tourists: why they come

Richard White has written extensively on the role of holidays and leisure in Australia in his text *On Holidays* (2005). He discusses how Australia as a country is known for its leisurely lifestyle: "One sign of Australia's prosperity when Australia boasted one of the highest standards of living in the world, was the quantity and the quality of its leisure"

(2005, xiii). In America and the United Kingdom, camp holidays remain popular with adolescents, whereas family holidays continue to flourish in Australia (White 2005). Holidays play an essential part of many people's childhood and this is true of the beach. Historically, the colonial ties of Australia to the 'mother country' generated a similar style of holiday to Britain – primarily the coastal scenery and crowd watching of seaside resorts (White 2005). However, the beach landscape in Australia is significantly different geographically to that of the United Kingdom, with more temperate oceans for bathing and a more surf friendly environment. The beach became a lure away from the metropolitan areas in Australia that the majority of people lived and worked in, and there was a desire to spend precious holiday time in "unspoilt" areas of the coast (White 2005, 87).

The beach is not the only holiday destination within the country; however, it is a very popular one. Unlike bushwalking and mountaineering, which can be difficult without a certain degree of fitness, all shapes and sizes can comfortably relax on the sand. The ocean can be more treacherous and does require a level of swimming skill; however, the beach is primarily a space that appeals to all demographics. Contemporary holidays are still frequently taken by road, but the popularity of beaches such as the Whitsundays (a collection of islands off the northern Queensland coast) suggest a more tropical style getaway is becoming more favourable. A more expensive option, the Whitsunday islands are portrayed differently to the smaller coastal towns such as Byron Bay, Hervey Bay, Ballina, and Coffs Harbour (all situated on the east coast, and all relatively popular tourist destinations). Regardless, the idea of the temporary holiday is one ingrained in the Australian psyche. Richard White explains how the Christmas period became synonymous with holidays after the development of annual leave in 1941. It was not until 1974 that four weeks' paid annual leave became the norm. Two weeks of these is usually taken during the Christmas period: "many businesses took the opportunity to shut down for holidays, creating not only a block of time for workers but also reinforcing a designated holiday season" (2005, 124). As a result, this holiday behaviour became a standard in Australian culture. Geographically, the distances covered generally required a car (and it was often considered cheaper than air travel), and thus the road trip holiday concept was a popular one. This is something seen in many texts about the coast: the three women in *Roadside Sisters* (Harmer 2009) who travel in a

campervan; the four teenagers in *Lost Things* (dir. Martin Murphy 2003) take a drive for a temporary holiday away from home; the orphans in *December Boys* (dir. Rod Hardy 2007); and the journey to 'schoolies' in *Blurred*.

Yet there is a significant difference between the holiday escape of a tropical island and Australia. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987, 54) assert that the beach in Australia is *not* a tropical hideaway. Instead, they suggest, "The beach that contributes to everyday existence must be metropolitan, therefore urban" (Fiske, Hodge, and Turner 1987, 54). In comparison to tropical holiday areas around Australia, such as Indonesia, Vanuatu and other Pacific Islands, the beaches in Australia cannot escape their elements of urbanism. This shifts how texts portray the beach as well, with none of the tropes of holiday romance fiction. Despite its inherent urbanism in Australia, the beach as a holiday destination is far enough removed from everyday life for the visiting family, with the addition of being still familiar, comfortable, and non-threatening. Many families travel to the same holiday destination year after year with standard bookings. Also, there is often similarity in beaches and beachside apartments that allow a level of familiarity despite a new location. The transient tourist population in areas like this, however, can generate discomfort with locals in these high traffic tourist destinations: for example, residents in Byron Bay are lobbying to remove illegal campers from the town's streets (Wilson 2012).

Although Australian beach holidays are sometimes urbanised, the natural ocean itself, is still a significant part. Perhaps the most important element of a beach holiday is the ocean view. Graeme Griffin (2003) examines this in regards to the Gold Coast, suggesting the ocean view becomes a premium – even though access to the beach is usually easy, free, and located close-by, being able to see the beach from the balcony of the room requires a higher fee. This is the case in most beach areas, and has become a norm for holiday bookings. Ocean views are now linked primarily to the idea of prosperity. Perhaps this harks back to the original English concepts of seaside holidays, which viewed the ocean as a healing source and desirable location. The ability to see the ocean from one's room could be considered to have a soothing effect. Yet, sometimes it is easiest to achieve an ocean view in other ways. For example, as can be seen in Figure 12 (Maroochydore ocean views, on page 160), a photograph taken from the balcony of a

beachside apartment complex in Maroochydore (Sunshine Coast, Queensland), the best views of the ocean are actually from the caravan park situated below. The prestige of the apartment block is certainly above that of the caravan park, yet the access and view of the beach is certainly similar, if not superior.

The next sections explore four elements of visiting the beach: the ability to do nothing, the ability to play, the requirement of a form supervision or mediation, and the coming-of-age experience. Many of these are targeted at tourists, although not all. Doing nothing is more appealing for adult tourists, whereas playing (notably different from sport) is considered more for children. Yet children do require some form of supervision (as do many people in the unpredictable ocean), such as a parent, although this can shift into a type of mediated freedom for teenagers. The beach for teenagers, however, can more frequently be considered a setting for a coming-of-age type of story, and has frequently been represented that way in narrative texts.

Doing nothing

There is something significant about the beach holiday that allows it to be unlike holidaying in bushlands or forest areas – that is, the appeal of doing nothing. Richard White suggests "the middle-class beach holiday took on the vacancy of a long stretch of day after day of pleasurable sensual idleness of sun, sand and surf" (2005, 108). Yet a significant reason that people come to the beach is for play. For children, the beach represents a holiday and the opportunity for games both in the water and on the sand. Unlike playgrounds, the beach is mostly a natural space that requires family to bring their own additional equipment (umbrellas, boards, balls, and so on). The adult and child, therefore, can engage in the beach space for vastly different reasons – play or inactivity.

An important element of this use of the beach is the layout. Unlike Britain, where the coastal buildings are usually low-lying, some major tourist destinations in Australia are marked by high-rises rather than seaside resorts. This is particularly obvious at Surfers Paradise – arguably one of Australia's main international attractions. As such the use and the way of engaging with the beach is quite different. There exists a variety of ways

to stay at the beach: camping, motels, apartment blocks, rented beach houses, and so on. This can be seen in Figure 11 (Maroochydore buildings, on page 159), which shows the coastline, a variety of apartment buildings, and then also a camp site directly at the beach. This popular coastal area at the Sunshine Coast in Queensland allows for many ways of staying at the beach with varying costs.

Playgrounds and play time

Children's literature has explored the beach in a particularly play focused manner. Texts like Winton's *Lockie Leonard, Human Torpedo* (1990) and Thiele's *Storm Boy* (1967) are both texts that tell of local children exploring their coastal environment (although in different ways). The distinction of children and adult audiences in film is not so obvious: although there are children's films, a film with teenage characters is not necessarily categorised as a teen film. Children's literature is prolific when writing about the beach. However, this thesis is not exploring representations aimed at children. Some of the texts have young characters, however, the focus is on the intended audience rather than the age of the characters involved. Play is a concept usually linked with children and the concept of play is significant in the beach context. Quentin Stevens in his text *The Ludic City: exploring the potential of public spaces* (2007) discusses the importance of play in an urbanised public space and how this displaces the role of the space's usual functionality: "Play is an important but largely neglected aspect of people's experience of urban society and urban space" (Stevens 2007, 1). In comparison, the beach is a public space where play is certainly not neglected. Leone Huntsman also identifies the beach as a site of play:

> [As we move into deeper water] we discover again the joy of play: of dancing through the forth, gliding up the wave face or diving through it (or, at a higher level of grace and skill, riding the wave front as bodysurfer, boardrider or windsurfer) (2001, 8).

Primarily, spatial studies has focused on land based spaces: cities and urban centres in particular (even Soja's text is primarily a case study of Los Angeles). Simon Unwin's chapter 'Constructing place…on the beach' (2003, 78) is one of the few examples that explores the beach rather than the city in regards to spatial awareness and geography. Unwin highlights the lack of existing established settings on the beachscape, such as furniture, that force users of the beach to build a place each time they visit. Therefore,

there is no sense of permanency to beach structures – tents, chairs, or towels are brought to the space and removed again when the day is finished. The beach can be also be a natural playground in which the geography of the sand and waves are their own equipment, rather than relying on the set structures of play seen in cityscapes. Families can also bring their own additional gear to create a playground for their children, including toys, balls, cricket sets, tents and so on. However, the play that occurs in textual representations of the beach often takes the form of surfing – especially for teenagers. There are many types of childish play that we recognise on a beach that are not often seen in textual representations. Perhaps this is, to once again touch on Richard White's discussion about the instinctive hedonism of the beach, because the beach can be idealised as something more than a space of pleasure and themes of play seem less worthy of attention.

Family and supervision

Yet it is not only children that use the beach as a playground. Adults will also engage in play, whether it is in sporting activities or with their own children. Families can be seen on the beach with the children playing and the adults reading, sunbaking, or resting. Children do need attention on the beach space, however. Richard White suggests:

> The ideal holiday fell somewhere between the safety of home and the dangers of the exotic; somewhere between spontaneity and freedom, on the one hand, and planning and regulation, on the other; somewhere between indulgent luxury and invigorating exercise; and somewhere between conformity to the crowd and the expression of individuality (2009, 3).

This is what the beach can provide – a partly regulated, partly natural experience. It is therefore not surprising that many beach texts attempt to capture this mediated freedom. An integral part of holidays, particularly with children, is regulation. The aspect of supervision therefore is an important one. In Anita Heiss' satirical discussion about Australian culture, *Sacred Cows* (1996), she mentions the role of the mother at the beach, the overstretched and underappreciated supervisor of the beach trip: "Surviving a day at the beach with the kids is an art that must be learnt by Aussie mums early in life" (1996, 19). Although Heiss' work is more parody than analysis, her work does highlight the integral element of a child's beach holiday – that of the mother. The mother character is a familiar figure in Australian texts. The previously mentioned *High*

Tide significantly challenges the traditional mother figure in Lilly. However, many texts include reference to the woman as mother, reinforcing Catriona Elder's (2007) statements about the inherent dichotomy of gender in Australia, or the "invisible woman". Elder suggests: "the valorised form of femininity in Australia is monogamous, heterosexual, maternal femininity, and it has been imperative that women fit this type as closely as possible" (2007, 68). As well as highlighting this continued normative representation of femininity, Elder believes that that the idea of women's role being in the private sphere still stands in Australian society, despite advances made in workplace relations and so on. The beach then, can be seen as two things: an extension of the home, and therefore a place for the woman to engage her "maternal femininity", or a place of sexualisation in which the woman is the passive, feminine object represented in bikinis on the sand. This gender dichotomy is explored more in Chapter Six, but in this chapter, it is important to note the importance of the mother figure in textual representations. *Newcastle*, for instance, shows the boys' mother as a working mum, once divorced, who strives for the best for her children but is ultimately unable to stop Vince's death.

The film *December Boys* (dir. Rod Hardy 2007) also explores the necessity of supervision and regulation. It is a story of four young boys from an outback orphanage in the 1960s spending a summer vacation at the beach. The narrative follows the boys' holiday and their attempts to convince local couple Fearless and Teresa to adopt them. The beach symbolises a type of freedom that they have never before experienced and that almost overwhelms them. One particular scene captures the necessary mediation when the three younger boys, Spit, Sparks, and Misty, take their first ride on the back of Fearless' motorbike. He supports them the whole way, riding slowly, but their enthusiastic enjoyment showcases how overwhelming the experience is for these boys who have never seen the beach previously. Hardy uses long shots of the motorbike riding slowly along the tide line of the beach interspersed with close-ups of the boys' faces to illustrate their unbridled excitement. It is only Maps, the oldest of the boys, who does not participate.

The beach is a complicated site in *December Boys* because it acts as a setting for many of the boys' interactions, which shift between comradely and bitter. Maps and Misty finally

resolve their tension when Maps attempts to rescue a drowning Misty from the water – neither of the boys can swim, and both need to be rescued by Fearless. Without supervision, the boys are at times violent, playful, and misbehaved. However, all is resolved once a supervisor, usually in the form of Fearless, arrives. It is assumed that on their own, the boys would not successfully negotiate the beach and instead would be consumed by the hedonistic opportunities provided. This is exemplified by Maps' relationship with the young local girl and his subsequent heartbreak when she leaves town without telling him. It was his rebellious behaviour that led to this situation, and if monitored, would have been stopped before he could engage in what was ultimately a pleasure-based experience. This film clearly shows the boys as visitors to this world. They struggle to understand the lifestyle of the community. Their position as non-locals is brutally exposed in the final act with their inability to swim. They cannot fit easily within this community without the fundamental skill. Although Misty is ultimately adopted and remains at the coastline, it will take work for him to be accepted as one of their own.

Coming of age

As children grow older, the beach is less about supervision and more of an experience that can change lives. Drewe has always maintained that the beach has a powerful impact on Australian youth, suggesting it is likely that a large proportion of the population has their first sexual encounter on a beach (Drewe 1993, 6). The focus for teenagers then shifts from being a regulated space into a space of mediated freedom. This freedom – never wholly unrestrained – can be seen in *Blurred* (dir. Evan Clarry 2002). It is a film about a group of high school graduates and their journey to 'schoolies' – the end of year celebration for year 12 graduating students, most famously at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast. This is perhaps the most mythic of beach holidays – Surfers Paradise and the 'schoolies' phenomenon (as discussed in Chapter Three) is significant in that it places the beach as an idyllic reward for graduating high school. The physical beach experience is actually less important than what it represents to 17 year olds on the east coast. This film focuses only on a group of teenagers' journey to schoolies (some successful and some not). *Blurred* is very much the story of a temporary stay at the beach, and the beach itself is less important than what the week represents: students

emerging into the world on the first step into adulthood. The beach, despite only appearing in a few scenes is still noteworthy. In particular, this story is intrinsically tied to Surfers Paradise and it is the image of this beach that is crucial to the story: one that represents freedom and relaxation. Unlike *December Boys*, this story is one of excess. Whereas the young boys were mediated in their experience of the coast by the presence of adults and limits on their own abilities, the teenagers in *Blurred* are all without supervision. The film is a comedy and some of the stories unwind very much in a humorous fashion: such as Calvin and Wayne, who accept a lift after their car breaks down from a man who appears to be crazy. Many of the simultaneous storylines end in chaos and this certainly appears to be a response to the lack of any mediation. The two characters that do end up on the beach, Pete and Frieda, are both there through their own motivation. Frieda attempted to maintain her mother's standards for her apartment, although she is eventually overrun by rowdy boys and their intrusion from the unit above. Pete leaves his two best friends, who have just begun a new relationship, so they can be alone. Both Pete and Frieda are alone but in control of their choices, and the film ends with them finding a new beginning together (if only temporarily) on the beach.

The coming-of-age theme, touched on in *Blurred*, is one explored frequently in international beach stories. Particularly popular with teenagers, this is a trope still identifiable in contemporary cinema. Jonathan Rayner discusses the 'rite of passage' films in which "the protagonist undergoing fundamental, formative and traumatic experience, travelling and questing within a country supposedly his own but over which he can exert little control, emerges as a key characteristic of Australian film narratives" (2000, 142 - 3). In America in particular, the *Gidget* (dir. Paul Wendkos 1959) franchise was a popular success throughout the 1960s that spawned numerous sequels and a television series and established the surf narrative as a significant player in the teenage coming-of-age narratives. Starring Sandra Dee, the film's climax is not a particularly inspiring one in the contemporary era: "Gidget gets her man [Moondoggie] and converts Kahuna, previously a confirmed bachelor and layabout, into a productive member of society" (Ormrod 2005, 40), ultimately shifting the "surfer" figure into something more palatable for mainstream audiences. This film, Ormrod suggests, brought in a new popularity to surfing culture in America that satisfied the white middle class, and paved

the way for a consumerist appreciation of surfing and surf films. Australia was of course not immune to this cultural shift, and as has been discussed in Chapter Two, surfing plays a significant role in Australian beach culture. Albie Thoms (2000) has written an extensive history on surfing films in Australia. This thesis is not examining films within the surf film genre (referring to films primarily shot in a documentary style with a focus on surfing style and technique); instead, *The Australian Beachspace* is interested in fictional narrative films and how they have chosen to represent surfing culture.

The most common type of representation of surfing, even in recent years, is that of a 'coming-of-age' story. But it is not only surfing films that encapsulate this theme. In Australia, this theme certainly continued with films such as *Puberty Blues*, *Newcastle*, and *Blurred.* There is something about the beach that inspires reminiscing, and it lends itself as a perfect setting for carefree stories of youths coming to terms with their sexualities, identities, and navigating the adult world for the first time. Australian cinema, more so than Australian literature, tackles these teenage themes on the beach. However, beach films in Australia generally are not critically well received. *Puberty Blues* is now considered a classic, and according to Screen Australia ranks 55 on the Top 100 box office cumulative earnings (2011). Yet it is an exception: none of the other films mentioned in this chapter – *Blurred, Newcastle,* or *High Tide* – appear on that list.

The imagined space: memory

So far, this chapter has established the division of coastal communities between the locals and the tourists, and also discussed the reasons for people visiting the beach. The role of the child, the teenager, and the parent has been examined in a variety of textual representations. The ordinary mundane life of the local has been juxtaposed to the more glamorous and sometimes mythic representation of the beach in tourists' eyes. Yet, the mythic connotations of the beach often shift when the tourist actually reaches the beach. What happens then is a layering of expectations alongside reality. This is particularly relevant for Australians who visit the beach as a child and then continue to return as they grow older. Memories, expectations, and the lived experience on the beach all combine to create a complex reading of the *beachspace*, bringing the imagined experience into the lived.

The beach is particularly effective at generating memory. It is a memorable location, and is frequently positioned as a contrast to other landscapes in the country (such as mountains or forests). It is highly evocative, with a distinctive smell and texture. As such, it is a very tangible setting for textual representations. There are two major ways that the beach plays a role in memory – either adults remembering their childhood on the beach, or children forming their memories. An example that manages to encapsulate both is Nikki Gemmell's memoir, *Why You Are Australian: a letter to my children* (2009). Gemmell is an Australian author who lived for many years in England and the novel is an emotional love letter to her birth country. It is nostalgic and imaginative, and occasionally indulgent. The narrative tells of Gemmell taking her children to Australia for three months while her husband remains in London. She is acting as a single mother, seeing her home country for the first time in years and introducing her children to an unfamiliar landscape. Initially her response is disappointment and concern that the Australia she once knew can never be regained. The tension between her expectations and the realities are high, and the situation – visiting what was once her own country but now as an outsider – is an uncomfortable fit. But the soothing sun and surf of Bondi Beach slowly reengages her: "I can feel the four of us uncurling as we arrive at the ocean and breathe in the slap of its briny air [...] Yes, it's magnificent and we stare in wonder, and gulp it all deep" (Gemmell 2009, 29). After this initial trip to the beach in order to truly immerse themselves in Australia, she takes her children away from the coastal edge. This immersion idea links back to Huntsman's (2001) concept of the Australian 'baptism' by ocean that was introduced in Chapter Two: the beach can play an integral part in what makes someone Australian. And for Gemmell, Bondi Beach is an important part of the experience both for herself and her children.

Settled into a regional area in New South Wales, Gemmell's children progressively learn to love Australia and the people. And Gemmell is quite desperate in her need for them to love her country. The children are initially reserved as the country consists of:

> Deadly creatures, many, the country teeming with them, in the oceans and rivers and the bush, in the swimming pools and garages and under the houses and possibly in your slippers which must be shaken out, every morning, without fail (2009, 8).

However, they eventually overcome their fears and Gemmell ultimately decides to remain in Australia for the foreseeable future, and thus the narrative shifts, becoming a story about a holiday to one about a new permanent location. It is undoubtedly a romanticised story of Australia at times and Gemmell is like many other Australian authors in describing the memories of her childhood. Their stories frequently explore the beach in a nostalgic light that sentimentalises the beach as a setting of beauty, fun, and excitement. And in this instance, there is an added level of romanticism in the way Gemmell recounts her observations of her children's experiences. Written as a second person narrative (in letter form) to them, it is an introspective account of their trip; therefore, *Why You Are Australian* becomes a combination of nostalgia for a birth country and for childhood both past and present. The beach in this memoir at times feels representative of the country as a whole and indicative of the success of the rest of the trip. Gemmell's concern that her children will not take to the country is palpable, as is her relief when they enjoy the sand and sea of Bondi. The narrative clearly illustrates the divide that Edward Soja encounters with space – the tensions between the real and the imagined. Gemmell struggles to match or combine the Australia, and the beach, of her memory and the one under her feet. It becomes apparent that it cannot be explained away as merely one or the other. It is a *beachspace*, that is simultaneously both and more – the imagined/remembered beach of childhood and the *lived* experience of the present.

Gemmell is not alone in her use of memory and memoir to discuss the Australian beach. Both Drewe and Winton, two frequently discussed authors, have written memoirs that feature their childhood in Western Australia. Yet memoir is not the only way memory plays a part in stories of the beach. Winton and Drewe's fictional stories are not autobiographical yet are influenced by their own experiences. Perhaps an important aspect of how the role of childhood and play is significant in beach texts is because of its link with hedonistic behaviour on the beach space. Similarly to Nikki Gemmell, Winton writes about his beach childhood in *Land's Edge* (1993), a memoir exploring aspects of both his childhood and adult life. He explains his affinity and comfort with the beach and how it provides a touchstone of sorts for when he is out of the country. Frequently nostalgic, Winton tells stories of his childhood in Western Australia, learning to surf and fish. He also includes stories of his adult years as well. Primarily, *Land's Edge* seems to

be a story of the natural wonder of the beach. For example, Winton tells of feeding wild dolphins and the power of that experience: "A woman shrieks, 'The dolphins are here!' but the crowd shushes her impatiently and a queer religious hush comes upon them" (1993, 39). It is something that only happens at Monkey Mia, and to Winton, helps to encapsulate the inherent beauty of the natural beachscape.

Winton's choice to write much of the narrative in second person voice helps to generate a collective appreciation for the beautiful spaces and creatures he describes. Gemmell too addresses her text as a second person voice and the use of this technique allows the memory to also become the reader's. The direct address enables the reader to layer the memory of the author onto their own memories of beach experiences. Winton's use of second person allows for conflicting concepts to arise within the text. For example, on one hand, his clear love for the beachscape acts almost as an advertisement; however, it is tempered by his inclusion of the natural wonders of sharks. A particularly haunting image is when Winton describes swimming with a shark: "This thing is really, unbelievably big. A plankton eater, harmless, majestic, and willing to swim with you a while as long as you keep your distance and behave yourself" (Winton 1993, 43). Ultimately, Winton's memoir captures an interpretation of his childhood experience with the beach and how it clearly had a significant impact on his interests as an author. Many of his texts include sections on the beach; in his many short stories based around White Point seen in *The Turning* (2005), *Dirt Music* (2001), and most obviously, *Breath* (2008).

For Winton, the influences of childhood are instrumental in how his life has unfolded. Yet he often writes characters that are not satisfied with the beach around them – it cannot provide the relaxation that it once did. Bruce Pike, from *Breath* (2008) is one example. At the end of the narrative Bruce Pike is a battered man who has struggled through life on account of his actions at the age of 16. It is a story that clearly highlights the notion that what happens in childhood can have a significant effect on the rest of someone's life. Teenage Bruce has an affair with Eva, an older woman who is the partner of Sando (Bruce's surfing mentor). Eva introduces him to sex, in particular, erotic asphyxiation, and it has a lasting impact on Bruce's life. The relationship shakes his bravado at a young age, but it is hearing years later about her death that causes him

to lose control over his life. His wife divorces him and he loses custody of his children. The novel ends with Bruce describing his occasional returns to his parents' home, back at the beach, with the intention of fixing it up. He still surfs the same waves he did as a boy although with less elegance and sophistication as an older man. The beach, once such a source of disappointment and despair, becomes a place of confidence: "My favourite time is when we're all at the Point, because when they [his daughters] see me out on the water I don't have to be cautious and I'm never ashamed. Out there I'm free. I don't require management" (2008, 265). Bruce achieves a feeling of confidence and beauty on the waves. He enjoys surfing purely for the sake of enjoyment, stripped from his negative experiences and the expectations of both Sando and himself along the way. The beach in this story then is a constant, but a space that creates an eventual safe haven for Bruce, a lifetime in the making.

For Bruce, the beach represents a type of mythical memory and this image is interwoven with the reality he experiences when he returns as an older man. This continual engagement with the beach means he is forever uncovering new and more complex meanings of the beach space. This is a common theme of Winton's work. The beach is active yet not overpowering, and by setting the stories in a fictional place that shares similarities with so many coastal Australian towns, Winton generates an open space that allows reinterpretation by his readers. The reader has the power to bring their own experience to the text, to view the text alongside their own memories. Winton does not 'close' or put boundaries around the beach, and as such he successfully represents a more complex beach than many other Australian texts.

Conclusion

The rivalry between locals and tourists continues to be an ongoing theme in stories of residential beach areas. This harks back to Fiske, Hodge, and Turner's (1987) idea of the cultural and natural divide on Australian beaches, and some fictional texts encourage that binary opposition. However, rivalry or discord aside, the beach is a different space for locals than it is for interim visitors. The Australian beach is and continues to be both a space for locals and tourists simultaneously: a lived space for the locals and an

imagined space for the tourists. Their shared interaction on the beach space, visible in the use of the beach as a playground, for instance, highlights the malleability of the landscape. What links these two groups – the locals and the tourists – is their mutual appreciation of the pleasure that the beach space can provide. Although initially considered a hedonistic, and therefore, unworthy way to spend time, the beach has become an accepted way of spending leisure time in Australia.

It is, however, impossible to ignore that there are differences between these two groups. This chapter discussed how representations of the beach suggest it could be a place of work for locals, while the tourist figure is a generator of income for the community. The fraught relationship can manifest in competition between the locals and the visitors, perhaps most clearly seen in textual representations of surfing. The authority and territorial behaviour of surfers is shown in texts such as *Bra Boys* and even parodied in Chris Lilley's *Angry Boys* (2011).

Another important element to the beach as a lived experience is the way children interact with the beach space. Children need to be supervised, and the role of the mother was established as the most likely (yet certainly not only) figure to embrace this role. And yet as children age, their freedom needs not be so closely monitored. In fact, as children age into teenagers, the beach is more likely to become a scene for their 'coming-of-age' story – something that is at once both a mythical type of narrative (overcoming obstacles and finding oneself) and incredibly ordinary (merely a passing moment in time). These experiences as children do not end there, of course. The memory of the beach experience can have a significant impact on adults as well, which was seen most obviously in Winton and Gemmell's nostalgic reflections in their memoirs.

The sense of nostalgia that often accompanies an adult's memories of the beach can often be muddled and confused thanks to the geographical sense of sameness of Australian beaches across the continent. This is not to suggest that all beaches look the same. However, the experiences often share similarities. Something that inspires this is the rhythm of the beach: the constant waves and the natural turning of time help to generate a rhythm that is familiar across many Australian beaches. As a result, memory

can become layered across current experiences and reality – a way of bringing the imagined or idealised beach into the present 'reality'. This trialectic then of memory, reality, and experience becomes integral to understanding the Australian beach as a *beachspace*. Many textual representations struggle to entirely encompass these ideas, ultimately limiting the beach to less than its full potential. The Australian *beachspace* captures all of these concepts simultaneously, experience, memory, and the imagined overlaying each other to create the *lived* experience of the beach.

Figure 11: Maroochydore buildings

This photograph was taken from the ninth level of a Maroochydore apartment building on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. It shows the coastline and the beach on the right of the image. Other apartment buildings are visible along the left and immediately in the foreground is a large campsite. A popular tourist destination, yet also a thriving local town, Maroochydore is an example of a community as discussed in this chapter.

Figure 12: Maroochydore ocean views

This image captures the concept of the ocean view. The image includes the edge of the building and balcony and the view of the coast in the distance. It is this view that is considered a premium in holiday areas. Holiday businesses charge more for an ocean view (often in comparison to a pool view) and, as this photo suggests, do not guarantee clear blue skies.

Chapter 6:

‘We Grew Here, You Flew Here’: the complex egalitarianism of the beachspace

We had each other’s backs, no matter what.
It’s a brotherhood. Sometimes it gets ugly
(dir. Sunny Abberton, 2007).

Chapter Five exposed the division in local coastal communities between the local residents and the visitors. There appears to be resentment by many of the locals of the interloping city dwellers, and this is represented in many of the texts. Yet the beach is a space that in itself is open to all. Chapter Six examines the egalitarian ideal of the Australian beach and challenges whether this remains the case.[4]

Australia has frequently been discussed in terms of its egalitarianism. On the surface, Australia’s social culture appears to reject the class separations of its British heritage. Class distinctions are not as strict or socially enforced, at least in mainstream representations. John Rickard (1996, 140) explains that the concept of an “egalitarian society became a popular myth capable of various uses – it could be handily deployed in comparisons with ‘class-ridden’ Britain, and similarly invoked to condemn the perceived absurdity of class rhetoric in Australia”. Yet, he suggests that the reality is Australia did not support this social myth and that class distinctions are apparent. The tradition of the myth remains “an important influence on social relationships and manners” (Rickard 1996, 260). This is certainly obvious in travel writing. In 2000 when American travel writer Bill Bryson published *Down Under*, the myth remained: “They [Australians] have a society that is prosperous, well ordered and instinctively

[4] Some parts of this chapter are due to be published in the forthcoming release, *Navigating Cultural Spaces: Maritime Places*, eds. A-M. Horatschek, Y. Rosenberg, and D. Schäbler (2012).

egalitarian" (Bryson 2000, 25). The myth that Australia is truly a place where democracy prevails remains strong.

The Australian beach as a setting has also been considered a leveller of class, gender, and race. Ann Game states in her article about Bondi Beach that "no one owns the sun, sea, surf – or everyone, all Australians, own it" (1990, 115). It is seen as a space that accepts all types and is open to all users. The legality of the beach allows for open access. In Australia, beaches are maintained by local councils and are not available for private ownership, which is different to other parts of the world: for example, some parts of the United States have privately owned beaches that deny access to casual visitors. Yet Leone Huntsman suggests that the beach becomes a place where people disregard differences rather than denying them (2001, 178). She believes that the beach space does not *erase* the differences between people; rather, it allows us to ignore them temporarily: "Generally people take it for granted that everyone belongs on the beach provided they don't interfere with anyone else" (Huntsman 2001, 178). She shares Rickard's assertion that social egalitarianism in Australia (especially on the beach) is more concerned with embracing class distinctions rather than rejecting them (Rickard 1996, 260).

There are still clear markers of difference between groups of people on Australian beaches, and many of these markers are linked to consumerism. Brands such as *Billabong* and *Quiksilver* [*sic*] are popular nationally and internationally, sponsoring surfing and other sporting competitions around the world. Surf brands, and their clothing and accessories, are obvious signs on the beach of social status, especially for teenagers. Obviously the beach space encourages a certain exposure of difference. It is a place where a high proportion of skin is showing – highlighting physical and ethnic differences. And swimwear choices can also expose religious beliefs: for example, the Burqini is a swimwear choice that conforms to Muslim requirements of dress for women by covering the head and most of the body (Christian 2007). So while people can still identify these markers of separation within the beach goers, it appears to be a 'tradition' not to comment on them while on the beach.

It is not as simple as suggesting that equality and egalitarianism are the same thing. As Soja explains, "Thirdspace is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings" (1996, 2). Using Huntsman and Rickard's idea of embracing difference, this chapter explores the complexities of the egalitarian beach. The mythic ideal of the beach does not match the reality of social beach spaces – yet the beach can be an example of an and/or/both space. It is a Thirdspace of equality – shifting, complex and difficult to encapsulate. It is not as simple as an ideally conceived equality, or the perception of equality we see everyday on the *beachspace*. It is, however, a *lived* egalitarianism and one that needs to be visited in order to understand the nuances of representation. In particular, there are four areas of discussion in this chapter: the equality of gender, body, class, and ethnicities. Fictional texts reveal much about how Australians use the beach space as a nation. By exploring how egalitarianism is represented on the beach and how this compares to its mythical interpretation, this chapter exposes how complex the concept of equality on the beach is.

It is necessary to highlight the initial problem with egalitarianism on the beach. Usually in Australian society, it is accepted that working earns money, which allows us to gain ownership of property. However, the beach is not known as a space of work (except for the lifeguards on duty, of whom only a small amount are paid). Despite this, the beach feels like a communally enjoyed and earned space for relaxation. Game suggested that the lack of distinction between classes does not suggest, "we all work" (as would traditional discourses of egalitarianism), but instead means, "we all have the same fun" (Game 1990, 115). Therefore, the beach is a shared space of relaxation rather than a space linked to a work ethic.

Australian beaches are not all homogenous and unshifting. Rather, certain beaches are frequently associated with specific uses and traditional socio-economic boundaries. Yet while there are particular beaches that Australians identify with certain lifestyles (such as nudist beaches, or more 'party' orientated beaches like Bondi Beach), we are frequently encouraged to view the Australian beach as a conceptual space of equality as a whole. This is most obvious in tourist advertising, in which beaches are depicted as a place where everyone can enjoy themselves without concern. Another way that the

beach is often portrayed as egalitarian is the concept that they are open to all. It is possible to visit the beach without money, equipment, or skills (although basic water safety is required). It is not a requisite that beachgoers must be attractive, fit, or talented surfers. In line with this idea, Geoffrey Dutton (1985, 20) suggests that the beach is a place of "democracy of the body", where it is possible to have "an absence of shame". He believes that the removal of clothing creates equality amongst beach users, in a similar sense to the way dust and mud covers everyone in the 'Bush'. Yet this democracy of the body is not as simple as Dutton considers. The imagined democracy of the beach is not reconciled to the reality of inequality within social groups. The presence of hierarchies within designer swimwear is just one example of how this democracy is only an idealistic concept. Advertising also encourages a certain athletic shape, which encourages certain brands of surf wear to be considered more acceptable than others for reasons such as price and style. The body, however, is not the only area in which a hierarchy exists: another area of struggle is beach functionality. For example, Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) read the beach as a place of zones, in which people are assigned to certain areas based on their usage of the beach (see Figure 13 – Zones of the beach on page 189). This photo, taken at Mooloolaba (Queensland) has been divided into zones using the definitions provided by Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987). Families are more likely to appear on what they term the esplanade or central zone (zones 1 – 3 on the photograph) with small children, whereas the swimmers, surfers, or body surfers are more likely to be in the water (zones 3 – 5 on the photograph). There is a privilege associated with zones 3 – 5: an athleticism and appreciation of the naturalness of the beach as opposed to those who chose to remain closer to the urban edge of the beach.

Although in principle all body shapes are perhaps accepted on the beach space, there remains a hierarchy of athleticism – surfers and swimmers are considered more authoritative than the day-trippers floating in the shallows. They have a higher status because they have more beach knowledge. Another physical sign of difference that Fiske, Hodge, and Turner identify is the suntan, which was discussed as a sign of health in Chapter Two. A lack of tan signifies a person as a "day tripper beachgoer" rather than "hard-core aficionados whose tans signify their membership of an elite" (1987, 56). This observation can be verified, as currently, there is a rising trend in the use of spray tans on the beach, yet this still is not considered 'real': a fake tan suggests an inability to

naturally tan. Thus it is possible to see that idealistic views of equality on the beach are complicated by the reality of obvious markers of difference and the associated social meanings of that. Peter Corris' noir text *The Empty Beach* (1983) illustrates Bondi as a separate world to the rest of Sydney. Yet even on the beach itself there remains differences: "I was early as always and I wandered down to the beach to kill the time. The suntanned people outnumbered the pallid, although it was only October. You can sunbathe all the year round in Sydney if you pick your spots and days and have nothing better to do" (1983, 9). The tan, it is implied, is a symbol in this text of laziness, or at least of people who put a tan ahead of work.

Gender balances

One aspect of beach representations frequently remains unequal – that of gender representation. Although ideally Australia would be considered to be a gender-neutral country, particularly in light of the current female Prime Minister, a patriarchy still exists. The beach space appears to perpetuate this inequality for various reasons. It is a place where swimwear is the predominant dress code; clothing designed to highlight the body of the wearer (and the bikini has a long history of being a symbol of controversial female progressiveness). Both Huntsman (2001) and Booth (2001) have discussed the history of decency and public bathing, and it is clear that the modesty of female bathers has frequently remained a sticking point in Australian society. Once the introduction of the bikini was complete, the battle for public decency waned somewhat: "In the 1950s bikinis flooded the Australian beach and each new season found briefer designs in vogue" (Booth 2001, 52). However, concepts of social modesty remain. In particular, the on-going battle for nudist beaches reveals how controversial the issue is (for example, see Booth's discussion of naturists, nudity, and the specific example of Reef Beach in New South Wales [2001, 59 – 64]). The beach is also a place of sport, an area of Australian society that continues to be dominated by men. Female surfing, for instance, still struggles for recognition unlike its male counterpart. Douglas Booth (2001, 103-105) discusses the trend in *Tracks* (an Australian surfing magazine) that saw many messages of misogyny throughout its publication, both in letters written by readers and advertising images. Booth gives many examples, including a contributor

who suggested feminists were "irrelevant to the debate because they're so out of touch with their womanhood" (Sutherland in Booth 2001, 104). Gender imbalance is an ongoing argument, one assisted by the continued gaps in all male and female sports (in television coverage and social importance). Booth suggests that the 1990s witnessed an increase in a "power approach" for women surfers (2001, 106). Yet this suggests that equality can only be achieved by women performing like men, rather than generating a new equality for all. Fictional representations of gender on the beach still appear to favour male dominance. Some texts show females with less authority and focus primarily on their bodies. Some have a lack of female representation at all. Ultimately, it is difficult to find many examples of texts that perpetuate gender equality on the beach.

Even a text concerned primarily with women is not necessarily portraying a more equal message. Gillian Armstrong's *High Tide* (1987) is a text made by a female director about a female driven story. It shows Lilly's discovery of her long forgotten daughter, Ally, and the subsequent struggles between Lilly and Ally's paternal grandmother. Lilly is not a terribly sympathetic character initially as she has a tendency to avoid a situation when it becomes too difficult to manage. It is ultimately revealed that this was her response when Ally's father died and the reason why Ally is being raised by her grandmother in a coastal town. The few men in the film play a minor role: the Elvis impersonator in the beginning appears to be a symptom of Lilly's nomadic lifestyle and acts as a plot device in stranding Lilly in Eden. Similarly, Mick, a brief love interest, is a vehicle to expose Lilly's fears and insecurities about Ally and her approach to life. However, although there are many female characters within this film, driven by a female creative force, the film alienates male characters by reducing them to primarily plot devices. Although Armstrong creates a touching story driven by family motivations, it once again separates gender representations rather than equalises them. However, the film was significant within its time context because of the lack of attention given to both female directors and female stories. And it still stands as a point of difference as the majority of Australian beach stories were, and continue to be, male dominated with male directors.

One such example is *Bra Boys* (dir. Sunny Abberton 2007), a documentary about a group of surfers in Maroubra (near Sydney, New South Wales) who form what becomes known as a surf gang. The film focuses primarily on the three Abberton brothers, the

main ringleaders of the gang. Koby is a professional surfer, Jai is caught up in a murder trial after defending his girlfriend from an attack, and Sunny directs the documentary. The Bra Boys have received poor representation in the media because of their violent tendencies – most obviously seen in a 2002 fight that broke out between a large number of surfers and the local police force (Abberton 2007). Overall, the film has a very minimal representation of females. The Abbertons' grandmother is referenced as a much-loved woman who took all the boys under her wing at one point or another. What links the surfers is their lack of stable home life and 'Nan' represents that for many of them. A scene of her funeral humanises the Bra Boys, who despite the best intentions of Sunny Abberton throughout the film, are still ultimately portrayed as a gang of men who believe violence is a legitimate answer to their problems. Abberton attempts to twist this conception in the film by showing the three brothers as ambassadors for peace in the aftermath of the Cronulla riots (explored in more depth below).

There is a perhaps inevitable focus on violence in *Bra Boys* and it is something seen in another surfing film *Blackrock* (dir. Steve Vidler 1997). The film, based on Nick Enright's play (1995) and subsequent screenplay, is an example of teenage violence on the *beachspace*. Enright's play was based on the true story of Leigh Leigh, a young girl murdered in a coastal town in New South Wales. The film tells the story of Tracy, a 16 year-old girl who is gang raped and later killed during a beach party, and the following aftermath. Much of the narrative charts the protagonist Jared, who witnesses the rape (although not the murder) without taking action. Ultimately, it is revealed that Jared's best friend Ricko – an older surfer that drives in and out of town chasing waves – is the one that killed Tracy. He confesses to Jared in the climax of the film, saying she came to him after the gang rape looking for comfort, at which point he attempted to rape her again:

> She asks me to look after her. Told me I'm a legend, puts her arms around me. 'Hold me', she says. I hold her […]. Asks me to take her home. I said 'Yeah, I'll take you home babe, but first things first'. I lay her down on the sand, nice and gentle, but she pushes me off. Okay, she wants it rough, she can have it rough. I lay down again and she fuckin' bites me. She bites me like a fuckin' dog. No bitch does that mate, not when they've come on to you like that. She said hold me! (1997).

Blackrock is a disturbing story of male violence against women. The town closes up on itself, with the boys all refusing to confess to any part of the crime. The film's narrative

is primarily occupied with the secret of how this happened to Tracy and the strong sense of brotherhood that joins the suspects and encourages their silence. Masculinity appears to overwhelm the remaining female characters – Jared is distant and short with both his mother and girlfriend (herself the sister of one of the accused boys); Cherie, Tracy's close friend is portrayed as an Other because of her intense reaction to the crime and frustration with the lack of resolution; and Ricko, the murderer, shows little remorse, seemingly insinuating that as a woman Tracy must have wanted it. The truth emerges on the beach when Jared finally confronts Ricko about his actions (and implying that he turned him in to the police). However unwillingly, the story is eventually revealed. Rather than face the police and subsequent imprisonment, Ricko chooses to throw himself from a cliff and is given a surfer's burial in the ocean by his friends. Although the burial is challenged in an emotional scene with Tracy's parents, ultimately Ricko's death is given more space and attention than Tracy's in many ways. Enright's story, and Vidler's film, attempts to highlight the misogynistic tendencies in Australia (Blackrock is a fictional town and is designed to represent all towns) and it is partially successful. However, the story is perhaps not damning enough of the boys' actions. Although Ricko is exposed as a vicious man, rather than facing justice and the legal system, he has the chance to remove himself from the situation. There is little focus on the punishment for the other boys who raped Tracy – the initial suspicion and shock passes and the boys' lives return, to some degree, to normal. The beach, as always, carries on. The beach in this text appears as a silent witness of Tracy and Ricko's deaths, and perhaps it is the only example of equality in the film, privileging no one regardless of their intentions. In the community of Blackrock, men appear to be the more dominant gender, yet that fades away on the beach. The ocean witnesses and accepts all. This resonates with Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, discussed in more depth shortly.

A classic beach text in Australia remains Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey's *Puberty Blues* (1979). It was made into a successful film in 1981 (dir. Bruce Beresford) and continues to be a well known text of the beach. The narrative is challenging, despite the youthful tone of the narrator's voice. It follows Deb and Sue, two young females living in Sydney and their attempts to enter into the popular group of students in their high school. In the novel, the girls are thirteen years of age; however, they were aged to sixteen in the

film because of their sexual activity and drug use. The story is one that challenges social norms of the time and authors Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey are clearly portraying the beach as a site of inequality, especially of gender and social class. Social standing, both financially and athletically, dictates which beaches the female protagonists are allowed to visit. For example, the elite surfers visit Greenhills Beach, whereas South Cronulla Beach is only for families and 'losers'. Once Debbie and Sue graduate to Greenhills they are relegated to staying on the sand because girls are not allowed to surf according to the social rules of their group. Debbie explains the "passport into [the] surfie gang" as a balancing act – never too fat or too skinny, never wearing too much or too little make up, and most importantly: "you had to be interested in surfing, but not interested enough to surf" (1979, 7). The gender dichotomy is apparent: the girls stay on the beach watching their boyfriends surf and provide them with food and towels when they return. *Puberty Blues* shows Debbie and Sue trying to break into the 'cool' group of students at school by conforming to their actions of smoking, drinking, and having sex despite their age. Lette and Carey portray their male characters damningly: they are, as Josephine May (2008, 65) calls them, "self-centred sexual predators". The most chilling incident is when three of the boys emotionally manipulate Freda, a social outcast – labelled a "moll" by Debbie and Sue – into sleeping with each of them.

Yet, the ending of this novel sees the girls break through some of these rigid social barriers; they reject the limitations of their school friends staying on the sand and instead buy their own surfboard and tackle the waves themselves regardless of the consequences of social exclusion. Debbie and Sue create a new, egalitarian vision of the beach – one that sees losers and 'cool' people sharing the same space without fear of retribution, and where girls challenge the authority of boys on the waves. However, it is not as simple as the girls reclaiming surfing for women. May (2008) suggests (when discussing representations of high school in the film version) that the film is actually a "capitulation to middle class capitalist acquisition and me-too 'feminism' where female emancipation from crippling sex roles is achieved by aping male behaviours" (2008, 65). It raises an interesting point about gender complications on the beach, and one that appears frequently in discussions about surfing culture. Do women achieve equality merely by surfing as men do? Booth's (2001) examination of surf culture, as mentioned earlier, suggests that this has been the case in Australian culture previously. Although

the males certainly are portrayed most poorly in Lette's and Carey's story, the females are certainly not upstanding citizens either: the opening scene of the film has Debbie physically fighting with another student on the school bus. Women then are perhaps guilty of masculinising themselves in order to achieve social acceptance.

Although the ending of *Puberty Blues* offers some respite from the overwhelmingly sexist narrative, the epilogue (which only features in the novel form) confirms the hopelessness Lette and Carey initially captured by explaining what happens to each of the characters. With few exceptions, they become single mothers, drug addicts, unhappy tradesmen, or, in the case of some, dead. It is a bleak story with an ultimately depressing finish. There is no doubt Lette and Carey intended *Puberty Blues* to be a chilling tale, exposing the reality of the surf culture of the time. It is a text that challenges that mythical image of the beach as an egalitarian space; instead revealing the inherent inequalities that exist in textual representations.

Another recent example is Dan Castle's *Newcastle* (2008). It is primarily a coming-of-age story of three brothers: Vince, a washed up surf champion, Jesse, on the cusp of winning championships, and Fergus, struggling with acceptance for his homosexuality. There are minimal female characters in the film – two are mothers (the boys' mother, and the mother of Vince's child), and two girls that accompany the boys on their ill fated overnight camp that results in injury and death. The girls' roles appear to be primarily as sexual conquests: they are prizes to be won and validate the authority of the surfing boys. Further proof of this is that the girls are shown partially naked during the sex scene where the boys remain mostly clothed. These girls, unlike Debbie and Sue in *Puberty Blues*, do not surf and appear to have no interest in surfing. Instead, they seem content to watch the boys from the shore while gossiping about their encounters from the previous night. This is similar to the girls in Murphy's *Lost Things* (2003), who use their position on the beach and the decision to sunbathe topless to entice the boys' interest. It is a disturbing trend that seems to be continuing; that of showing a large percentage of female flesh on beaches purely with the intention of attracting sexual attention.

Gender representations remain a complex area of analysis in many areas. The Australian beach setting in contemporary texts does not appear to be showing much advancement from a position of patriarchy. Whether by negative portrayals or a lack of representation, gender equality is difficult to find in beach texts. As such, the mythical concept of egalitarianism of gender on the beach is challenged by the ordinary lived experience of these texts that suggest women are underrepresented and sometimes guilty of masculinising themselves in order to fit within the social hierarchy of the text.

Who you are or where you're from?

Indigenous relations on the beach have a complicated history, and this has been explored in some detail in the Introduction. It becomes complex when considered alongside the idea of ownership of the *beachspace*[5]. Indigenous inhabitants of Australia have had a complicated history concerning legal ownership. There are still disparities seen in relation to problematic ownership questions of traditional Native Title, and also surrounding concepts of multiculturalism, an ongoing issue that Australia has faced since World War II. The coastal beaches of the continent were the stage of many early confrontations between the Aboriginal people and the early English colonisers on Australian shores, during which the Indigenous people suffered the loss of large numbers of their population. Australia's Indigenous population makes up only 3% of the country (Taylor 2006) and the Australian government did not recognise any form of traditional ownership of the country until 1992. As Collins and Davis state in their text *Australian Cinema After Mabo* (2004, 4): "Australian colonial histories show that, from day one, European settlers/invaders recognised the fiction of *terra nullius*". The Australian legal system only declared the concept of *terra nullius* (empty land) a lie with the Mabo decision in 1992 and this paved the way for the 1993 Native Title Act, which recognised traditional ownership of the land by Indigenous populations. However, this remains a contentious issue in Australia with ongoing legal cases, such as the 2006 case of Noongar Native Title in Perth, Western Australia.

[5] Some of this section regarding Indigenous ownership and textual representations of the beach has been published previously in an article titled *Flagging Spaces: exploring representations of ownership on the Australian beach* (2011).

Beaches are areas open to all ages, genders, ethnicities and usage is governed by local councils. British theorists Knox and Warpole in their study on public spaces suggest that ownership of the space is not of importance: "To members of the public, it is not the ownership of places or their appearance that makes them 'public', but rather their shared use for a diverse range of activities by a range of different people" (2007, 4). In terms of usage, the beach then is open to all and is owned by all Australians regardless of ethnicity. However, usage alone does not represent ownership. Indigenous ownership and use of the beach is often problematised by the negative or romanticised representations of Aboriginal people in texts.

Anita Heiss, an Indigenous author of fiction, poetry, and academic writing, caustically examines predominately Anglo-Australian beach culture in her novel *Sacred Cows* (1996). Her intention is to write not from the margins, but from the position of authority:

> What I have done in this book is something that non-Indigenous authors have been doing for years. I have looked at an opposing culture from an assumed authoritative position, stating perceptions as well as suggestions for bettering it, coupled with humour (1996, xi).

Heiss then proceeds to satirically examine aspects of 'Aussie Culture', including the beach. Lifeguards, considered the bronzed hero of Australian popular culture, are "bowlegged, broad-shouldered, mirrored-sunglasses and walkie-talkied lifeguards [who are] on a power trip as they blow their whistles and pump their biceps" (1996, 28). Aussie women are too self-conscious to show their flesh, while overweight men shamelessly parade around in miniscule swimwear. Heiss creates an uncomfortable position of awareness for a white reader by humorously criticising Anglo-Australian culture from an outsider's perspective. She maintains a distance away from this version of Australia, self-consciously assigning herself as Other.

Langton (1993) and Jennings (1993) both examine Indigenous representations, primarily focusing on film. Much has been said about the dangers of romanticising the concept of 'traditional' Aborigines, and Jennings states that this romanticising in fact leads researchers, filmmakers, and anthropologists "to ignore vital topics such as miscegenation, fringe dwelling and the urban population, and have mobilised popular

notions of 'full-bloods' and 'part-Aborigines'" (1993, 13). As far as beach culture is concerned, there appears to be a gap in contemporary texts portraying Indigenous characters, rather, they remain positioned inland. One example of a contemporary narrative is Heiss' chick lit novel, *Not Meeting Mr Right* (2007). In this text her main character, an Indigenous woman in her late-20s, interacts very ordinarily with the *beachspace* in her beachside suburb of Sydney. Alice interacts with the beach in much the same way as any other Australian: she walks the coastal path from Bondi and Coogee, sunbakes near one of the rock pools, uses sunscreen, and cools off in the water. Although there are significant elements within the text that continue to challenge the habitual racism of Australians, there is comfort in the way Alice can enjoy the beach like anyone else and is viewed by other beachgoers as belonging.

However, Heiss' work is only one example. In general, as Langton says, romanticising 'traditional' Aborigines is a frequent aspect in Australian texts. An element of this may be because of the reification of the mystical, traditional Aboriginal, which does not allow for representations of urban Indigenous people. As Jennings states:

> Such distinctions [referring to scripts that ignore facts to combine appealing elements of Indigenous culture to create a better, yet inaccurate, product] which deny the viability of a modern distinctive Aboriginal society, are manifest in white Australian literature and cinema which virtually ignore urban Aboriginal life in their preoccupation with the traditional and the exotic (1993, 13).

A recent example is Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia* (2008), which not only sets the majority of the story in the Northern Territory (many representations of Indigenous characters are limited to this area) but also includes blatantly mystical representations of Indigenous culture and spirituality, particularly in the character of Nullah, a boy born of an Indigenous mother and white father, and his grandfather King George, the 'magic man'. Although the late 1930s – 1940s setting of the film limits how the Indigenous characters can be represented because of the political climate of the time, *Australia* is certainly guilty at times of romanticising the Indigenous spirituality.

The beach plays a small yet significant role in *Australia*. Nullah is taken against his will (and despite the care of Lady Ashley and Drover, both Caucasians) to Mission Island along with other "half-Aboriginal children". Lady Ashley is attempting to return Nullah to her care when Darwin is attacked by the Japanese. Mission Island is the first hit, and

the camera slowly pans over Nullah standing on the beach staring upwards as he hears the drone of the engines overhead. This image of war is very different from other representations, such as Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981), in part only because it takes place on Australian soil rather than in Europe. Australians themselves are the targets, not only the ANZACs, and in this instance Indigenous and Caucasian Australians are attacked as one. Once the bullets begin, Nullah and the other children start running for shelter. Drover and his Indigenous friend, Magarri, sail out to Mission Island to try and rescue them. Magarri sacrifices himself to make sure the boys make it onto the boat. In a scene strikingly reminiscent of *Gallipoli* (1981), Magarri drops his weapon and runs along the beach as a distraction until he is shot in the back, telling Drover in his last breath to "drove 'em home, Drover". It is Drover's duty to see the boys safely off the island because he has family now and therefore needs to live. The unorthodox family of Sarah Ashley, Drover, and Nullah are reunited – if only briefly before King George summons Nullah on a 'walkabout'. Nullah sheds his clothes, throwing his shoes off with relish, and departs from his western carers into the hands of his 'real' family.

Allowing Nullah to be rescued and returned to his grandfather and be raised amongst his own culture suggests perhaps Luhrmann is in fact attempting to atone for the Stolen Generations. Nullah's life is threatened on multiple occasions throughout the film, most significantly on Mission Island and when the antagonist Fletcher tries to shoot him. Both times the attempt is thwarted by an Indigenous man – Magarri and King George. The westerners, although clearly showing Nullah love and affection are not enough to keep him from harm – thus he is returned to his 'blood' family. Luhrmann condemns the racist treatment of Indigenous Australians through both the narrative and also the sympathetic portrayal of his Indigenous characters, particularly Nullah, but in some ways contradicts this by placing his Indigenous characters in the 'Bush' setting and affirming the stereotype of the 'traditional' Aborigine.

Tracey Moffatt, an Indigenous filmmaker, chooses not to focus only on Indigenous characters in her short film *Heaven* (1997). Set on an unnamed beach, the film is a voyeuristic experience of watching young men changing after surfing on the beach to a soundtrack of lapping waves. Moffatt retains control as the author of the film and transfers the traditional male gaze into the female gaze on to the young, masculine body.

With clear appreciation of beauty and athleticism, Moffatt's camera tracks the men firstly from within a house, framed through windows and blinds, and then continually moves closer to her object. At times, she appears to engage the men in conversation as they undress or dress, crossing boundaries of acceptability for both the object and the audience. One moment sees a man attempt to light-heartedly swat her away as her camera darts in, attempting to catch a glimpse of his genitals. The film showcases all types of nationalities or heritage: Caucasians, African Americans, Indigenous Australians, and Asians. All of these men are joined by their love of surfing and the almost ritualistic changing experience that happens after a day at the beach. However, Natalya Lusty suggests that Moffatt is in fact creating a type of mock-ethnographic film:

> The intense scrutiny of Moffatt's ethnographic gaze as she films and contemplates this peculiarly beachside ritual serves as a reminder of the colonial gaze of white male anthropologists who documented the naked and semi-naked bodies of indigenous subjects (Lusty 2005, 3).

The occasional tribal chanting soundtrack aids this reading. When viewed through this lens, the white body becomes a space that is caught in near nakedness, vulnerable and objectified. Lusty also suggests that there is an "implicit shame of the naked white body that has served to define the very terms of racial difference" (2005, 3).

The white body is not the only focus in *Heaven,* however, and there is certainly a performative aspect to the work as well. Moffatt's work, on one level, captures the Australian experience of a beachgoer that can unwillingly (or perhaps willingly, as in this case) witness surfers changing in car parks or footpaths. By examining the male body through such an obvious, appreciative gaze, Moffatt almost eliminates concepts of ethnicity and nationality and creates a *beachspace* that is a place of admiration for aesthetic, physical beauty.

Another Indigenous director, Rachel Perkins, adapted Louis Nowra's play *Radiance* for the cinema screen. *Radiance* (1998) shows three sisters, Mae, Cressy, and Nona, coming to terms with their mother Mary's death in her beachside house. The beach on the mainland is a space of revealment in the emotionally charged final act of the film. It is here, on the way to Nora Island to scatter the ashes, that Mae tells of her struggles with their mother's precocious senility and the rage she felt at her inability to cope with her, screaming in her Indigenous language "I hate you, I want to kill you" the day she died.

Perkins emphasises this scene by layering the sound of Mae's screaming so that it appears to echo around the women in the entirely natural beach space. Mae's dark skin is contrasted by the white of her mother's wedding dress in the scene. It is the first time Mae shows any emotion but rage, and expresses her fear that her mother hated her – "In her heart of hearts, she hated me". It is also the only moment that is specifically Indigenous, using a language other than English. Although *Radiance* features an Indigenous cast and director, the story itself has universal themes of loss, grief, broken families, and un-revealed secrets.

The secret of Nona's parentage is the most shocking secret of the film. Cressy reveals that Nona was the result of one of Mary's boyfriends raping her when she was twelve. Nona responds with disbelief and runs to take the tin of Mary's ashes to Nora Island while she can. The way to the island is only accessible once a year, and the tide is unrelentingly creeping closer and closer. By this stage of the film, the water is up to Nona's waist as she wades across the ocean. An aerial shot of Nona scattering the ashes is now layered with meaning as Nona now knows the truth – that Mary was in fact her grandmother, and Cressy her mother. The beach remains unflinching and pure, a witness to this horrible truth. Nona returns to the mainland the next day on a barge and joins Mae and Cressy in the car, and the equilibrium – although disturbed – is regained.

Although Rachel Perkins is an Indigenous director, the play *Radiance* was written by Louis Nowra, an Anglo-Australian. *Radiance* therefore is a challenging example of an Indigenous film about Indigenous women, written by an Anglo-Australian male. Indigenous literature has been explored previously, although the beach is not a trope that features often. Anne Brewster (2003), in her article titled 'The Beach as 'Dreaming Place'', explored the beach in Aboriginal literature. She labels it as a "border zone where the invader occupies the indigene's land" (2003, 39), but also as a "zone in which different temporalities conjoin" (2003, 35). The use of memory is significant for Australian Aboriginals, Brewster notes, because of its role in "[inventing] local future" (2003, 39). Therefore, Indigenous understandings of the beach differ greatly from Western understandings, as Brewster states:

> Aboriginal literature challenges the fiction of a traditional Indigenous identity fixed in time and for whom parallel worlds, time travel and the future are unavailable (2003, 40).

Byrne and Nugent (2004) suggest that a better approach to understanding Indigenous cultural heritage is through landscapes rather than sites. The term landscape in this instance refers to coastal regions as a whole, creating spaces of heritage on large stretches of connected land. Comparatively, sites tend to indicate individual areas of beaches – for example, individually named beaches like Manly, Surfers Paradise, or Cottesloe. Although landscape can be a problematic term in regards to beach analysis, (see Huntsman's concern about "the lack of a word for land or landscape that also evokes and includes the coastal fringe" [2001, 166]) it connotes the appropriately broad scale concept required to better appreciate Indigenous attitudes.

One interesting point *The Australian Beachspace* has uncovered is that the use of water in Indigenous texts appears to focus on rivers and waterholes rather than the beach. One immediate point of significance is the importance of fresh water. This is not to suggest that the beach is unimportant in Indigenous life but rather that the attachment may reveal itself in a different way. For example, Terri Janke's novel *Butterfly Song* (2005) is the story of Tarena, an Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander woman. She returns to Thursday Island after she finishes her law degree to help her mother retrieve a family heirloom. *Butterfly Song* mentions the beach – Tarena grew up in Cairns – but it does not feature heavily in the narrative. Instead, Thursday Island appears to be more significant as an island whole: when Tarena arrives by plane, the sand is noticeable purely in that it borders the island and is a gateway to the ocean. Tarena's grandfather is a pearl fisherman, and one day his non-Indigenous boss leaves him behind in the ocean. Kit manages to swim back to shore, but again the focus is on the contrast of land and ocean, which still excludes the in-between *beachspace*. Indigenous perspectives of the beach are limited perhaps because of the role of the beach in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history of Australia. The beaches were places of conflict when Anglo Saxon settlers began arriving. As Cathcart explains in his book *The Water Dreamers:*

> the contact between white settlers and the Aboriginal owners triggered a battle for resources. In a country where water was scarce – and where it was central to the cultures of the Aboriginal peoples – the battle for land was also a battle for water (2009 6).

Since the newcomers mostly settled in coastal colonies for close proximity to coastal ports, the Indigenous population was pushed inwards to the centre of the continent.

Thus, it is possible that their relationship with the beach landscape shifted after the arrival of Western settlers.

Yet it is not only Indigenous identities that are sometimes hidden on the *beachspace*. A high percentage of the population in Australia claims another ethnic background alongside Australian heritage. In particular, English, Irish, and Scottish ancestry is common (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). The beach is considered to encourage people to share the same space for the same reason regardless of ethnicity, and this is evident in Drewe's short story, 'Eighty Percent Humidity'. The story portrays an egalitarianism of relaxation. The narrative's protagonist, Paul, reflects while walking on the beach that:

> Even the neighbouring Hari Krishnas could have it all over him. Pallor, pony-tail top-knots and all, they are showing a joyous vigour and a surprisingly civilian ability at bodysurfing. In their flippers and Speedos they are just ordinary Aussie lads kicking on to the big ones, he thinks (1983, 143).

Suggesting that the Hari Krishnas are 'ordinary Aussies' helps Drewe to create a sense of equality within this story. However, it also reinforces the notion of assimilation, that if one can 'fit' in to the beach activities one is accepted by the wider community. The Hari Krishnas show ability at surfing, a typically Australian sport, and thus are accepted within this egalitarian image of the beach. This equality is one found by excluding difference rather than accepting it. Unlike Rickard (1996) and Huntsman's (2001) ideas that Australian egalitarianism is about accepting difference, Drewe's story suggests the opposite.

A text like *Diasporas of Australian Cinema* (Simpson, Murawska, and Lambert 2009) suggests that filmmaking in Australia still engages specifically with marginal identities. Simpson, Murawska, and Lambert suggest this evolved from Australia's cultural policy:

> In order to cope with the diversifying population [as a result of increased migration after World War II], a policy of cultural assimilation governed official rhetoric during the post-war period, arguing that 'new Australians' would be absorbed socially and culturally into the mainstream Anglo-Australian community (2009, 18).

Texts are representative of cultural identity, and Miller suggests that some Australian texts are representing a lack of belonging: "More and more people feel as though they *do not* belong; more and more people are *applying* to belong; and more and more people

are not *counted* as belonging" (in Simpson, Murawska, Lambert 2009, 9, original emphasis). This can be associated with the beach in the context of immigration. Asylum seekers remain a politically charged topic in Australia. Interestingly, the beach in this context acts as an impassable border. Comparatively, in traditional island narratives, often the beach is a space that traps inhabitants in as castaways stuck on an island with no hope of rescue, seen often in literature and film: for example, HG Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), and the film *Castaway* (2000, dir. Robert Zemeckis). However, in Australia, the beach often acts as a space that shuts people out, rather than keeping them in. The Australian continent is not a traditional island despite geographical definition; rather it is a country surrounded by a sea border designed to protect the sanctuary of its people.

The subject of immigration remains one that divides political opinion. It perhaps most obviously came to a head on December 11, 2005, a day that saw Cronulla Beach in New South Wales become the stage for violent rioting. Initially triggered (according to the media) by an attack on two male Anglo-Australian lifeguards by Lebanese-Australians, the ensuing violence made international headlines. Slogans such as 'Aussie Pride' and 'We grew here, you flew here' were painted on signs, bodies, and the sand itself. Affrica Taylor, in her book chapter 'Australian bodies, Australian sands', suggests that the beach itself is not passive – instead, it is "co-implicated in the construction of the authentic Australian subject and must therefore be understood, at least partially, as a cultural construct" (2009, 115). The Cronulla riots stood against Australia's policy of multiculturalism. Australia as a country is primarily inhabited by migrants; 97% of Australians have ancestral origins from outside of Australia; that is, all Australians not of Indigenous descent (Taylor 2009, 118). In the Cronulla situation, the migrants, especially those of Lebanese descent, were marked as 'un-Australian', thus allowing the Anglo-Australians to affirm themselves as the 'real' Aussies. Yet, as Taylor remarks, this was a case of "selective amnesia of the White postcolonial 'custodians'" (2009, 118), once again excluding the position of the Indigenous inhabitants of the country. Multiculturalism is a significant element of Australian life, and some of the fictional texts written about the beach confirm this. Ethnicity then can play a role on the beach, even though the majority of beach texts do not discuss it.

One recent text that does make mention of different cultural backgrounds is Stephen Orr's *Time's Long Ruin* (2010). It is a fictionalised story that re-imagines the disappearance of the Beaumont children in 1966. Orr's narrator is the next-door neighbour of three children who disappeared from Glenelg Beach in South Australia. The novel portrays the disappearance and the subsequent police search, along with the community's response to the incident. Henry Page, the narrator of the novel, is retelling his story as an older man. He has lived in the house of his childhood his whole life, highlighting the differences between the present and the past. His young eyes paint everything in an innocent naivety. He briefly mentions the struggles between 'old' and 'new' Australians, such as the neighbouring Greek family who lost their son in the sea. They are called "bloody dagos" (2010, 57), yet Henry's father smooths the situation over time after time. Orr presents Croydon as a seemingly rose-tinged perfect suburb, not ignoring the racial inequalities of the time but reimagining how the scenes unfolded. The beach itself is painted in a similar light, perfectly beautiful, becoming an unlikely stage for this horrific, unsolved crime that continues to plague Australian parents to this day. Yet, ironically, the beach life carries on just two days after the children disappear:

> A few old couples waded through the shallows with their pants rolled up. There were other kids, in groups and pairs and alone, sent to the beach by parents who hadn't read the paper, or had and didn't believe lightning struck the same place twice. Police cadets and junior constables, in uniform shirts and their own bathers and shorts, still combed the foreshore (2010, 230).

Time's Long Ruin creates an uneasy sense that these children were ordinary and that the crime could happen to anybody. They were unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The beach continued to function as usual only two days after the disappearance. The beach landscape becomes a neutral zone in this text, seemingly unforgiving and uncaring. Orr's nostalgic exploration of 1960s Australia idealises an egalitarian evocation of the beach space. In this instance, Orr's Melbourne is a utopian world that, because of its dystopic beach setting, is revealed as a cracked, flawed vision.

All bodies are created equal

As mentioned previously, Geoffrey Dutton (1985) suggests that the beach was a place of 'democracy', especially of the body. By removing clothes, the beach becomes a setting where people are levelled by their physicality. Yet this appears to be perhaps a naïve

understanding of the situation: bodies on the beach are not considered equal – as encouraged by surf brand advertising, and also the physicality of beach users in films. There is an implicit judgement of body shapes that is reflected in the choices of actors in film. For instance, both *Newcastle* and *Lost Things* show young, attractive people on the beach. There is not often a visual representation of an oversized or unhealthy body, and certainly not in a flattering manner. Yet the beach in reality is a little different, as can be seen in Figure 14 – Maroochydore bodies (on page 190). The beach in this instance is populated by a variety of body shapes and swimwear styles. The two people in the foreground are of larger size, more common for the population, and this body style is not frequently represented, and not positively, in texts. Athleticism and health are the most common representations of hierarchical dominant bodies and this can be clearly seen in surfing texts.

An example of this athletic hierarchy can be seen in Winton's text *Breath* (2008). The novel portrays a type of idealistic egalitarianism through surfing, but it is complicated by the inherent hierarchy of skill and health necessary for surfing. In the beginning of the novel, the protagonist Bruce Pike and his friend Loonie find themselves fascinated by the world of surfing. They hitch lifts to the beach and beg to borrow surfboards until they finally secure their own. Yet, despite the inherent equality of the ocean, the boys still find themselves within a hierarchy: the water is treacherous and uncertain, and they are hampered by their ability. Almost immediately, the boys identify a 'guru' – Sando is an older man with extraordinary skills, never intimidated by the unpredictability of the surf: "There was something special about his insouciance and the princely manner in which he cross-stepped along his long, old-timey board" (2008, 34). The social order of the beach in *Breath* is not concerned with the urban concepts of money and class; Bruce and Loonie are certainly not wealthy characters. However, once they own a surfboard, they are judged on their skill rather than acquisitions. In *Breath*, the social order of the beach through Bruce's eyes is based on surfing skill. Sando, as the most experienced within their sphere of knowledge, is therefore offered the most respect, despite his lack of employment, money, and educational qualifications. Sando's partner, Eva, is not afforded the same understanding: although once a successful freestyle skier, she was injured and is considered less powerful as a result. And although Dutton suggests (1985) that the beach allows for all shapes and sizes, in *Breath* being a

talented surfer means being fit and wiry – there is no space for a multiplicity of sizes in Bruce's hierarchy.

However, *Breath* is not alone in privileging the athletic figure. *Coolangatta Gold* (1984) unabashedly showcases the male form, with lingering shots of glistening bodies during the final triathlon race. Even Steve's girlfriend is a dancer, petite and fit. The older characters are no exception to this: for example Steve and Adam's father, is also an ex-triathlon competitor and therefore is also shown to be a healthy, athletic build. The television show *Bondi Rescue* (2006 – ongoing) privileges the healthy masculine bodies of the lifesavers, and also at times the bodies of beachgoers (with a clear focus on female bodies). Only *Goodbye Paradise* (1983) shows an aged, larger figure on the beach, and Stacy is never concerned with swimming or relaxing – instead intent on finding answers to his case. Therefore, textual representations do not comply with Dutton's democratic approach to the body on the Australian beach.

Class distinctions

Australia has never been as concerned with class distinctions in the same way that England has been. Yet there is still a divide between certain socio-economic groups. It is particularly apparent in Sydney, where the Western suburbs are generally considered to be rougher areas. Nevil Shute's text *On the Beach* (1957) is an example of the beach as the mythically imagined 'great leveller'. The novel, which depicts the aftermath of extensive nuclear war in the northern hemisphere, portrays a type of equality at its dystopian end. The novel is set in Melbourne; the last place for the radiation to filter to after the brutal nuclear activity successfully sets in motion the end of all human life. The beach witnesses the shocking demise of all humanity in this last city, yet the waves continue to roll. The four main characters in the novel all deal with the unfolding situation in different ways. The last day sees Peter and Mary choosing to take the tablets to end their and their baby's life. Dwight takes out the navy submarine and sinks her into the ocean. And Moira decides to end her life on the beach overlooking the ocean in an attempt to spiritually join Dwight in death. Their relationship is a delicate one throughout the novel because Dwight's family was in North America and had

undoubtedly perished before the narrative begins. However, he refuses to acknowledge this and is therefore affectionate with Moira but unwilling to pursue a romantic relationship. Moira, a young woman used to many romantic suitors, finds a kindred spirit in Dwight and thus chooses to spend her last moments in accord with him.

The final chapter of the novel is a horrifically chilling story of death and the unfair nature of nuclear war that has a world of people dying because of the actions of a few. But each character chooses their path and is afforded some agency even at the end. The final day of the narrative is stormy, transforming the beach from idyllic beauty into a wild, natural scene:

> The sea lay before her, grey and rough with great rollers coming in from the south on to the rocky beach below. The ocean was empty and grey beneath the overcast sky, but away to the east there was a break in the clouds and a shaft of light striking down onto the waters (Shute 1957 311).

The natural motion of the ocean and the sands continue unrelentingly despite the collapsing of human and eventually all animal life. The image of the beach's eternal movement never ceasing is a haunting one. Although the story focuses primarily on middle to upper class characters, *On the Beach*'s radiation sickness leaves no survivors. The rich are not afforded more possibilities for safety than the poor. The beach alone is what remains 'alive' and in motion once all humanity is extinguished. The beach setting for Moira is shown as a type of utopian space in Shute's dystopian world, a place where she can join Dwight in his final moments.

Although the class distinctions are perhaps not as obvious as in Nevil Shute's work, there remain a certain hierarchy of social groups. It is seen more clearly in the way certain beaches are associated with particular lifestyles. In Queensland, Noosa Beach is considered a 'trendy' beach; it is not great for surfing and thus brings a different crowd of people, such as walkers and sunbakers. It is an extension of the very urban suburb surrounding it, while retaining a natural feel. Hastings Street, the main street of Noosa, is populated by expensive, trendy shops and restaurants and a surf club borders the beach itself. The beach-goers reflect this environment. Noosa is a beach often frequented by local Australians as well as international tourists, because it is an expensive place to stay and therefore excludes some travellers on a lower budget. However, Surfers Paradise (on the Gold Coast) is also an expensive place to stay, yet it

attracts large numbers of tourists and significantly fewer locals. It embraces its tourist beach image far more obviously than Noosa, and is an example of a very urbanised space where the shops and restaurants are close to the waterfront. Bondi Beach is also considered a tourist destination because of its close proximity to Sydney city. The beach itself has a large lifeguard patrolled area, and the Bondi Surf Lifesaving Club is one of the oldest in the world. Thus, it is an iconic space for international tourists and travellers. As such, many of the retail shops and restaurants close to the beach are expensive. Yet Bondi Beach is also considered trendy amongst locals as well. Game (1990, 196) suggested that Bondi is a place of unification: there is a "diversity of cultures, classes, sexualities, ages, [and] ethnic groups". In comparison, Manly Beach, also close to Sydney, is considered a more family friendly space. The same situation happens again in Perth: Cottesloe is considered the must-see beach of Perth, with minimal waves and clear water, yet is not a surfing beach. Rottnest Island, off the coast of Perth, is an expensive place to visit (both the ferry and accommodation are highly priced), but it is still popular for families. Thus the differences between beaches in Australia are apparent, even if these are not always discussed in textual representations.

Many Australians have an affinity towards one beach or another depending on their lifestyle; for example, the researcher's upbringing on the Sunshine Coast and in Brisbane means a bias towards the 'north coast' beaches, such as Mooloolaba and Maroochydore. However, other Brisbane families prefer the Gold Coast beaches from Surfers Paradise to Currumbin. Often, the direction that families travel in is linked to their suburbs, both for reasons of proximity and also financial status; people from lower socio-economic suburbs such as Logan (located south of central Brisbane), for example, are generally linked to the southern Gold Coast. Huntsman agrees, stating "different beaches attract different kinds of beachgoers, often because of their proximity to particular suburbs with their differences in class composition" (2001, 177). This is similar to other geographic locations in Australia. For example, in Sydney, Palm Beach is considered a more 'high-end' beach than Cronulla, and the suburbs in close proximity also represent this socio-economic divide.

A textual example of this difference between the seaside and the beach is in DH Lawrence's *Kangaroo,* which he wrote in 1923 after visiting Australia. Primarily a story of politics, it follows Richard Somers and his wife's trip to Australia and their interaction with both right and left wing activists. Somers is a sceptical man who is embittered by his own wartime experience in Cornwall and struggles to empathise with either political stance (the socialism that Struthers represents or the fascism of Cooley's club) presented in the novel. Lawrence includes significant descriptions of Australian landscapes in the text, and while this is predominantly the 'Bush', the beach does appear initially in the story. Somers continually defines the Australian beach by comparing it to his experiences in his English homeland. For example, he refers to the beach only as the seaside. Yet the Australian beach does not always behave as the English seaside, and as a result, Somers finds the sea terrifying and unpredictable: at one stage "the noise of the sea came in frightening, like guns" (1923, 96) through open verandah doors.

However, despite his uncertainty and fear, Somers interprets the Australian beach as a place of freedom, "a relief from tension, from pressure. An absence of control or will or form" (1923, 26). That freedom is a horrifying concept for the sceptical Somers; he feels Australia is an irresponsible place, where money has no "magic", where liberty is uninteresting (1923, 26-27). Lawrence captures in his novel the sense that Australia is a democratic, egalitarian place, although this is not necessarily a good thing. Lawrence's Australia is starkly different to England in that it is not radically defined by class; people care little for money, rather preferring holidays:

> All Sydney would be out by the sea or in the bush, a roving, unbroken world. They all rushed from where they were to somewhere else, on holidays. And tomorrow they'd all be working away, with just as little meaning, working without any meaning, playing without any meaning; and yet quite strenuous at it all (1923, 27).

It is the idea of it being devoid of meaning that is interesting: Lawrence is suggesting that the focus on relaxation and pleasure is so strong that it eliminates the meaning of the everyday world they leave behind. Instead, the country becomes a place of working for no meaning and therefore the concept of relaxation is shifted – the meaning is lost when there is nothing to be relaxing from. The beach in *Kangaroo* certainly belongs to everyone and is open to all regardless of their financial position. Yet *Kangaroo* as a text does initiate a debate on class, suggesting that Australia is perhaps not as classless as it

appears and exposing underground political movements. Overall, the novel is indeed concerned with political representations of Australia, but the beach remains a daunting, unpredictable site for Somers' unease, while remaining an unsettling space of meaningless equality for the Australians.

Conclusion

The Australian beach plays a continually significant role in Australian national identity and in the lived experiences in the Australian people. As Huntsman argues:

> It seems to me that the place of the beach in Australian life is too prominent, our attachment to it too deep, for its history to remain unrecorded and its deeper significance to be ignored and unexamined (2001, 5).

The egalitarianism of the Australian beach is a fractured concept. Australia is a country of multiple cultural backgrounds, and the beach appears to be a space that can unite cultures as well as highlighting differences. Taylor believes that "through immersions, revisitations and sensory imprintings, beach play becomes 'second nature' for many urban children and naturalises a passageway into Australian adulthood" (2009, 120). Therefore, it can be suggested that the beach itself plays an important role in 'Australianising' people of different cultural backgrounds from an early age.

Traditionally, the beach has been considered a place of equality; where all Australians are welcome regardless of age, gender, size, or ethnicity. Yet the beach texts complicate this idea, representing a more complex definition of equality. As discussed, the role of gender on the beach remains a conflicted site of representation, with many texts still conforming to patriarchal ways of separating gender. It is particularly obvious in filmic examples; the camera lingers on young women in bikinis rather than providing dialogue or strong relationships. Unfortunately, this appears to be a continuing trend – *Newcastle* from 2008 was one of the worst perpetrators of this sexist attitude.

A discussion about equality must acknowledge the problematic ownership issues between Western colonisers and Indigenous Australians of the beach space, and the markers of difference that the beach setting so often reveals about Australian society. In particular, social events like the Cronulla riots, suggest that in reality the beach is far

from an egalitarian space. An examination of a number of Indigenous texts, including film and written texts, highlights the continual struggle for equal representation.

The body is another site of proposed equality that is not always shown in representations. The beach setting, although a space of relaxation, remains a public space with the associated laws of public decency. The celebration of the body remains politicised: once again the aesthetic examples of film certainly privilege a healthy, youthful body. Naturists still struggle for acceptance of nudist beaches and the representation of nudists in society remains a damning one.

Class distinctions on the beach also remain apparent in some texts, such as *On the Beach* and *Kangaroo*. These texts are much older than the majority discussed in this chapter; however, what emerges from this analysis is that class distinctions remain apparent on the beach space but are explored less obviously. It is worth nothing that Lawrence and Shute were both English authors (despite Shute's later emigration to Australia), and therefore perhaps were more sensitive to class. It could be argued that they saw class distinctions where they did not exist. Whereas Lawrence's political story made certain to highlight the class differences, Winton's characters are clearly from a low socio-economic background. However, the focus remains on the surfing – their hierarchy of power revolves around ability rather than material possessions.

By exploring some Australian texts in this chapter, it appears that several conform to the idea of the beach as a complex setting of egalitarianism, but other texts quite obviously challenge the myth. However, no text completely encompasses both the mythic and ordinary egalitarianism and therefore the Thirdspace remains a hypothetical concept. Interestingly, the textual portrayals of the beach are not easily divided by a chronological order. Although the more recent texts, Winton's and Stephen Orr's, appear to be aware of the realities of the lack of equality on the beach, an older text like *Puberty Blues* (1979) clearly highlights the dichotomy of gender on the sand. Of the newer texts, Orr, particularly through a focus on childhood, portrays an almost naïve narrative of mateship. In comparison, Winton's text, although in some parts nostalgic, tells a more haunting tale of a young boy plagued by his inadequacies and diving in too deep to a world he did not understand. *Time's Long Ruin* harks back in many ways to

Nevil Shute's work, invoking a yearning to return to a classless setting of idealistic pleasure. Yet the earliest text, *Kangaroo,* is well aware of the class distinctions in Australia even in the early 1900s. By analysing this selection of Australian texts about the beach, it is clear to see that the egalitarian myth of the beach is not embraced in all of the texts.

It cannot be said that Australia is returning to a period where all Australians (or none) own the beach, yet it does remain that the beach setting is a complex site. Conceptually, the beach is an example of a Thirdspace– one that is made up of an and/or/both relationship of perceived and conceived ideas of egalitarianism. Interestingly, the texts that most openly embrace the idea of egalitarianism are the Indigenous texts. Too many recent texts struggle, particularly with equal gender and ethnic representations. It is therefore not possible to say whether the beach is, as Game suggested in 1991, a place where all ethnicities, genders, and bodies can democratically interact without fear. The *beachspace* is a combination of equality both mythic and everyday, with textual examples so far failing to portray a lived type of equality that has progressed beyond the limitations examined in this chapter.

Figure 13: Zones of the beach

This photograph is of Mooloolaba Beach, on the Sunshine Coast (Queensland). This image has been adapted to include Fiske, Hodge, and Turners' zones (1987). They establish the zones on a type of nature – culture divide, with Zone 1 representing the closest connection to culture (and the urban), and Zone 5 representing the closest connection to nature. There are significant differences into the way the beach is used within these zones, which can be seen here. Most sunbakers are positioned between zones 2 and 3, and walkers are primarily seen in zone 4. There are bathers in the ocean in zone 5. Just to the left of this image is an esplanade, which has playground equipment and picnic tables and is often occupied by families. This pattern is frequently repeated in beaches all around the country.

Figure 14: Maroochydore bodies

This photograph was taken on a sunny day in Maroochydore and shows the differing body shapes and swimming costumes on a regular day at the beach. The lifeguard presence is clear, both to the left of the image and the lifeguard standing at the water's edge. Different levels of sun protection can be seen, such as hats, sunglasses, and t-shirts. The people standing in the foreground of the shot are larger body types, yet as can be seen in the background, there is a large range of body shapes in the water. The reality then in this image suggests that the body distinctions are not as starkly clear as the textual examples represent them.

Chapter 7:

Discussion and Conclusion

Australia is not the only island continent in the world, nor it is the only country with an identity bound up with beach culture. However, as *The Australian Beachspace* has demonstrated, Australia's relationship with the beach is a complex one. The beach means much to Australian culture, yet its significance is impossible to exactly pinpoint. This stems in part from the way the beach can never be definitively captured in one representation because the meaning of the beach is too layered to be confined. This helps explain why attempts to capture the 'real' Australian beach have often failed to be successful. A clear example of this is the way films set on the beach are rarely, if ever, popular in the box office. An obvious example is *Coolangatta Gold* (1984), a film that superficially should have been a success. It was the story of an Australian family, combined with concepts of lifesavers, athleticism, beautiful golden beaches, and notions of mateship. Despite this, however, the film failed to bring many local audiences and also did not break into the American market (Crofts 1990).

Coolangatta Gold, however, is not the only film to alienate its audience. As mentioned, of all the films discussed within this thesis, very few have been considered successful by traditional measures such as box office profit. *Australia* (2008) and *Two Hands* (1999) both rated highly (Screen Australia 2012) in their respective years of release, but many others have fallen into obscurity. *Australia*, however, uses the beach primarily as a setting to reinforce mythical representations of Indigenous characters, and its representation of the space remains limiting. *Two Hands*, in comparison, generates a more complex beach space by showing Jimmy finding relief while simultaneously being robbed, and this text goes much further in capturing the inherent complexities of the beach in Australia in only a brief scene.

Edward Soja's (1996) theory of Thirdspace comes the closest in providing a framework to reveal the representations of the Australian beach as it allows for more complex understandings to occur that advance the space beyond binaries. It allowed *The Australian Beachspace* to explore a more complex understanding of space. Thirdspace is a theory that does not exclude binaries, rather encourages all representations to exist at the same time, without hiding the collision of opposing ideas. "In this critical thirding, the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of *restructuring* that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives" (Soja 1996, 5).

The beach is not a smooth or passive space, but instead an active and ever-changing, ever-shifting space. Soja's Thirdspace differs from a liminal space in that it does not blend or blur into the borders of another but instead allows differences to exist in their full form. The beach can reveal much about our own society through examining textual representations of it. Yet it is always more than these images and stories: a space "directly *lived*, with all its intractability intact, a space that stretches across the images and symbols that accompany it, the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (Soja 1996, 67).

An important point that this thesis identified was the way in which much Indigenous literature and film already uses concepts of Thirdspace in their discussions of the beach. For example, in Anita Heiss' *Not Meeting Mr Right* (2007), in which the central Indigenous protagonist simultaneously challenges casual discrimination by highlighting her ethnicity while also blending into the beach culture of Sydney. *The Australian Beachspace* is not suggesting that these writers are taking directly from Soja but rather that their understanding of space and identity is not limited by the same frames as many of the non-Indigenous representations. As Brewster (2003) highlights, Indigenous texts frequently engage with temporal and spatial fluidity and therefore capture more complex representations of the Australian beach.

Tim Winton is probably the Australian author who most allows the complexity of the beach to reveal itself in his stories. Winton's works have been explored throughout the thesis, with particular focus on his more recent works *Breath* (2008) and *Dirt Music* (2001), and his autobiographical text *Land's Edge* (1993). He plays with memory and

childhood, challenges gender stereotypes and traditional relationships. At times, Winton's stories can become nostalgic, particularly seen in *Breath* because of the framing device used (in which the protagonist is telling the story as an older man). However, Winton does not close off his beach from other representations. He also creates a complex imaginary beach site, White Point, that features in many of his texts with different characters. This beach is obviously inspired by real places and yet remains fictional, and therefore a space layered with experience and memory for Winton, the reader, and the characters. Winton is particularly interested in creating specific locations – his beaches are named places that explore ordinary people, yet the stories do not lose their sense of mythic wonder. Winton allows his readers to see the complex beach and how this plays out.

Although Soja's terminology has provided a necessary starting framework for capturing the beach that develops beyond binary oppositions, ultimately what *The Australian Beachspace* has found is that the beach is too difficult to capture even within this expanded concept. This thesis has described five types of Thirdspaces throughout its chapters, using concepts such as myth, memory, the urban, and so on. However, the very existence of these multiple Thirdspaces highlights the resulting limitations of the theory. These spaces can be found in representations of texts simultaneously, which suggests the *beachspace* cannot be limited to thirding techniques. The *beachspace* term, as the thesis has posited, is therefore not a phrase that can be used interchangeably with Thirdspace, but is instead a new phrase that attempts to refer to all the Australian beach can be. It is therefore of no surprise that many texts fail to truly capture the beach in their representations. The least successful texts, such as the novel *Silver Bay* (2007) or the surfing film *Newcastle* (2008), continue to show the beach in terms of binaries. *Silver Bay* clearly privileged the natural over the urban and used the character of Mike to showcase how appreciating and saving the natural transformed him as a person. *Newcastle* tended to highlight the glamorous beauty of the beach while continuing to conform to stereotypical representations of gender and failing to truly showcase the layered complexities visible beneath the surface.

The Australian beach is an enormous topic and this thesis cannot capture all that it is and could possibly be. However, *The Australian Beachspace* has opened up a dialogue

around the beach that suggests it is necessary to continue to examine this space beyond the binary oppositions that have been used in the past. It continues to enforce the idea that the beach, despite its pleasurable and hedonistic qualities, is worthy of discussion. The Australian *beachspace* is a space unlike any other landscape in the country, where the mythic and the ordinary collide and generate a new, more complex type of setting for narrative texts to explore. The *beachspace* will continue to shift with the rhythms of the tide and generate new meanings and new identities for the space as time passes. By allowing the space to be examined in a new framework that combines textual analysis with spatial theory, *The Australian Beachspace* encourages further examination of the Australian beach in as many forms as possible to continue to ponder the complex meanings the beach has to offer to the nation.

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